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Space, time, auteur-ity and the queer male body: the film adaptations of Robert Lepage

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What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. . . . In fact the crystal constantly exchanges the two distinct images which constitute it, the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved: distinct and yet indiscernible, and all the more indiscernible because distinct, because we do not know which is one and which is the other. This is unequal exchange, or the point of indiscernibility, the mutual image.[1]

In the scholarship on the films of Robert Lepage, a dominant critical paradigm has emerged to complement the academic focus on his theatre. Drawing primarily on the work of Gilles Deleuze, and making frequent comparisons to Alain Resnais and Alfred Hitchcock, critics have elaborated a whole taxonomy of space-time collapses – from parallel montage, flashbacks and films-within-films – that work to absorb and sustain the past within the present in Lepage's cinematic representations of memory.[2] Such effects are, in turn, often linked to questions of authority, or the lack thereof. For, as Henry A. Garrity points out, the reconstructed past in Lepage's films is essentially a *de-* or *un*authorized one, lacking an identifiable narrator, in the sense that the edits used to

3   See Garrity, 'Robert Lepage's
    cinema of time and space', pp.
    102, 105–6; on Deleuze's
    definition of the 'recollection-
    image', see his *Cinema 2*, p. 54.
4   On how the presence of a narrator
    need not be a precondition of
    narration in film, and on how film
    narration 'presupposes a
    perceiver, but not any sender, of a
    message', see David Bordwell,
    Narration in the Fiction Film
    (Madison, WI: University of
    Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 62.
5   In an earlier version of this paper, I
    had used the word 'gay' instead of
    'queer' in formulating the
    argument that follows. However,
    as the anonymous reader of the
    paper noted, this presupposes a
    somewhat essentialist conception
    of male homosexual identity
    formation (and deformation) that
    is belied both by the theoretical
    framework of the paper itself, and
    by the imaging of several of the
    sexually polymorphous characters
    in Lepage's films. At the same
    time, it might be argued that 'gay'
    is one of the signifiers lost in
    translation in Lepage's
    reauthorizing of his 'queer' male
    bodies from stage to screen.

evoke the past on screen are more often than not the result of Deleuzian 'irrational' cuts, which cannot be tied to a diegetic character's actual sensory-motor recognition but only to extradiegetic, or virtual, representation, what Deleuze calls the 'recollection-image'.[3] Neither can these recollection-images be tied to a stable point of view, other, that is, than that provided by the omniscient camera.[4] This is, perhaps, another way of saying that if Lepage's films, by virtue of their status as mediated texts generally and 'adaptations' more specifically, lack an author (in the Barthesian sense), they do at least have an auteur.

In this essay, I examine the intersection of auteurism and adaptation in Lepage's cinema by focusing on the transposition of images of the queer male body from his theatrical source texts to their filmed adaptations.[5] While perhaps not as visibly or politically 'out' as fellow Québécois theatre contemporaries René-Daniel Dubois and Michel Marc Bouchard, both of whom have seen their most famous (and famously gay) plays adapted memorably for the screen, neither does Lepage make a secret of his homosexuality. Moreover, his theatrical creations are filled with all manner of queer characters and images of same-sex eroticism. Curiously, however, in Lepage's first four films such characters and images are either largely absent or, in the case of *Le Confessionnal* (1995), so overlain with the symbolic weight of internalized guilt and dysfunction as to be borderline homophobic. It is possible to interpret such changes as Lepage's concession to the more mainstream audience tastes that govern the film industry. Likewise, one can see this as a necessary consequence of what, after Deleuze, we might call the collision of 'two distinct images' of the Québec cinematic imaginary, where past memories of political, social and religious repression continue to haunt present representations of gender and sexuality. At the same time, however, I would argue that the changes also point significantly to Lepage's own *self*-adaptation from theatre to film director.

What is at stake here is that, as film auteur, Lepage is arguably able to control his cinematic narratives more vigilantly than his theatrical ones, most of which were created collaboratively with his Théâtre Repère and Ex Machina troupes, or with cowriters such as Marie Brassard, and which Lepage has famously argued are never 'finished', because they are always evolving and being adapted in the necessarily evanescent and non-repeatable context of the performance moment. However, when it comes to the filmic artefact, and representations of the queer male body recorded (or not recorded) therein, a degree of auteurity necessarily accrues by virtue of each film's temporal positioning after, and thus definitive recording of, each play's constitutive images. Or, to put this in the terms outlined by Deleuze in the epigraph to this article, the image moves from the 'virtuality' of the past (those once fleeting and now lost moments of theatrical inspiration, rehearsal and performance) to the 'actuality' of the present, where it can be ceaselessly and unchangeably replayed in the temporal and spatial moment of apprehension that constitutes the film's projection. What I am interested in exploring in this

essay, then, is the 'unequal exchange', the 'point of indiscernibility' that occurs in the 'crystallization' of images of the queer male body in Lepage's translation of, and surveillance over, his (and others') stage narratives as they are adapted into screen narratives. Because many of these images reflect a highly ambivalent – and atemporal – intersection of the religious and the secular, the political and the personal, the social and the familial in Lepage's work, attention must also be paid to the mutuality of the sexual symbolic and the national symbolic in much Québécois cinema.

Thus, before going on to my queer reading of Lepage's films, it is first important to note how any such reading is inherently governed by a larger, and largely psychoanalytic, cultural discourse in Québec, which has repeatedly recuperated filmic representations of homosexuality within a framework of Québec's arrested development and English Canada's social dominance. Here, I am alluding to a very influential 1987 article by Gilles Thérien, which argues that representations of same-sexuality in films by Micheline Lanctôt (*Sonatine* [1984]), Jean Beaudin (*Mario* [1984]), Léa Pool (*Anne Trister* [1986]) and Yves Simoneau (*Pouvoir intime* [1986]), among others, are in fact restagings of Québec's permanent identity crisis, where the child of the Quiet Revolution, alienated, but unable to completely cathect her/himself from, a patriarchal family environment, displaces this power dynamic onto a 'falsely feminine' idealization of a person of the same sex (who stands in for English Canada).[6] While Thérien's argument, and the homophobic presuppositions underpinning it, have been succinctly and efficiently deconstructed by critics such as Robert Schwartzwald and Bill Marshall,[7] this has not stopped others from applying its analytical paradigms to an endless catalogue of films not discussed by Thérien, including, in Martin Lefebvre's case, *Le Confessionnal*. As Lefebvre notes, the scenario described by Thérien 'completely overlaps with Marc's situation in Lepage's film':[8] Marc (Patrick Goyette), unable to reconcile his feelings of bitterness for his recently deceased 'adoptive' father, allows himself to fall back into a homosexual relationship with the ex-priest-turned-federal diplomat Massicotte (Jean-Louis Millette), who drags Marc to Japan on government business. Significantly, it is here, in this foreign country, that Marc commits suicide, death 'the only possible outcome for he who can't accept domination yet refuses to challenge it'.[9]

While I find much in Lefebvre's reading of *Le Confessionnal* to be convincing, this last point is less so. Indeed, the problem with conscripting the queer male as a signifier of failed or unrealized national identity in Québécois cultural production generally, and the corpus of Lepage's films more specifically, is that that signifier very often ends up a corpse. In an illuminating article on Hitchcock's frequent film adaptations of drama, Alenka Zupančič notes that '*Every time cinematic and theatre realities coincide*, every time cinematic and theatre narratives overlap, *there is a corpse*'.[10] André Loiselle has recently explored the pertinence of this insight to Jean Beaudin's 1992 adaptation

6 See Gilles Thérien, 'Cinéma québécois: la difficile conquête de l'altérité', *Littérature*, no. 66 (1987), pp. 101–14.

7 See Robert Schwartzwald, '"Symbolic" homosexuality, "false feminine", and the problematics of identity in Québec', in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 264–99; Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, pp. 129 ff.

8 Lefebvre, 'A sense of time and place', p. 96.

9 Ibid.

10 Alenka Zupančič, 'A perfect place to die: theatre in Hitchcock's films', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 80. Italics in original.

11 See André Loiselle, 'Cinema, theatre and red gushing blood in Jean Beaudin's *Being at Home with Claude*', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1996), pp. 17–33; and 'The corpse lies in *Lilies*: the stage, the screen, and the dead body', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 76 (2002), pp. 117–38.

of Dubois's play *Being at Home with Claude* and John Greyson's 1996 adaptation of Bouchard's play *Lilies* (*Les Feluettes*).[11] One could just as easily apply this insight to the films of Lepage, each one an adaptation of a theatrical narrative in some fundamental way, each one featuring, however obliquely (as in the case of *Nô* [1998]), a corpse. My argument in the rest of this essay, then, is that the corpse-as-signifier in Lepage's films, even when not literally embodied/discarnated by the queer male, is nevertheless tied to the 'death' of certain important homosexual significations in Lepage's source-texts, and that such auteurial revisionism has important implications for the gendered reception of both his cinematic *and* his theatrical narratives, as well as for a Deleuzian reading of Québec's national imaginary more generally.

As an adaptation, *Le Confessionnal* is multiply complex: not only does it contain characters from Lepage's first great theatrical triumph, *The Dragons' Trilogy* (chief among them protagonist Pierre Lamontagne), it also consciously quotes and incorporates scenes from Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953), itself an adaptation of a 1902 stage play, *Nos deux consciences*, by French playwright Paul Anthelme. Finally, *Le Confessionnal* is also an anachronistic and anamorphic sequel to Lepage's next great theatrical project, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, which concludes by placing the eastern-identified Pierre in Japan.

Lepage has described the character of Pierre Lamontagne as his 'alter ego', a 'linking character' who makes connections between the various threads of Lepage's theatrical and cinematic narratives, and between those narratives and the audience: 'His naive approach towards the events he encounters [reflecting] the spectator's position'.[12] Lepage goes on to admit that 'Over the course of his incarnations, the character developed a few inconsistencies'.[13] Thus, *Le Confessionnal* begins with Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau) returning from China, where he had gone to study calligraphy, in 1989. *Seven Streams*, however, ends with the character (here renamed Pierre Maltais) arriving in Japan in 1995 to study *butoh* dance, an Orientalist elision which makes one question Lepage's statement that his 'fascination with Japan began when [he] was sufficiently mature to be able to distinguish it from China'.[14] Similarly, it is worth noting that the fluidly bisexual Pierre of *Seven Streams* (who seduces not only David Yamashita, but also, it's implied, his mother, Hanako) is, as we shall see, straightened out, or at the very least *de*sexualized, in *Le Confessionnal*.[15]

Le Confessionnal's opening shots gesture towards the disjunctive spatio-temporal poetics that govern the film as a whole. Following a Hitchcockian establishing shot of the Pont de Québec, there is a cut to shots of the 1953 premiere of Hitchcock's *I Confess* at Québec City's grand Capitol cinema. Here, the space of our present tense viewing of *Le Confessionnal* starts to merge with the pastness of Lepage's fictional intradiegetic spectators' viewing of Hitchcock's film, Pierre's voiceover recalling, as the camera focuses on his mother, Françoise's (Marie Gignac) swollen belly, that there were actually three Lamontagnes

12 Robert Lepage, with Rémy Charest, *Connecting Flights*, trans. Wanda Romer Taylor (London: Methuen, 1997), pp. 33–4.

13 Ibid., p. 35.

14 Ibid., p. 42.

15 It is important to note that any reading of Pierre's screen sexuality necessarily overlaps with such extradiegetic considerations as Bluteau's own sexuality and his previous acting roles. Again, as a reviewer of this paper put it, Bluteau, 'although fiercely private, may well have a personal identity that matches his onscreen queer personae in such New Queer films as *Bent*, *Orlando*, and *I Shot Andy Warhol*, but his public persona, as well as his onscreen sensibility in such films as *Black Robe* and *Jésus de Montréal*, are basically asexual, and the character of Pierre surely appropriates that asexual aura'.

attending the screening that night. In the next scene, the now-adult Pierre arrives home to attend the funeral of his father, Paul-Émile (François Papineau), who has died after a long battle with diabetes. Thereafter, the film cuts back and forth between the 'present' diegesis of 1989 and the 'past' diegesis of 1952. The 1989 narrative concerns Pierre's attempts to reconnect with his estranged adopted brother Marc, who works as a male prostitute. The 1952 narrative details the pregnancy and eventual suicide of Marc's unmarried birth mother, Rachel (Suzanne Clément), Françoise's younger sister.

The diplomat Massicotte provides the link between the film's past and present narratives. In flashbacks to 1952, we learn that a much younger Massicotte (Normand Daneau) actually began his working life as a priest, serving the church in Quebec City where Hitchcock (Ron Burrage) and his crew are preparing to shoot scenes for *I Confess* under the guidance of Hitchcock's harried assistant (Kristin Scott Thomas), and where Rachel also works as a *femme de ménage*. No longer able to hide her pregnancy, Rachel is dismissed from her job, but not before confessing to the young Massicotte that Paul-Émile is her unborn baby's father. Unable to break the seal of confession, and with Rachel unwilling to confirm otherwise, Massicotte is in turn removed from his post after suspicions are aroused in the congregation that he is Rachel's lover. The two storylines converge in a double denouement that features several cuts between parallel scenes in both time-frames, the closing titles and the final shot of the Chateau Frontenac at the end of the 1953 screening of *I Confess* mirroring Pierre's apprehension of the 'truth' about his family in Massicotte's room at the same hotel at the end of *Le Confessionnal*.

Having shown how this narrative can be recuperated allegorically into the larger heteronormative story of Québec's national identity crisis, I shall now examine the queer male character's key symbolic role as the 'fall guy' within that story, concentrating in particular on how his body is framed and disciplined by the quasi-panoptical composition of several of Lepage's shots. In this regard, it is first important to point out that the two queer characters in Lepage's film are introduced to the spectator via their positioning within lofty spaces. Massicotte occupies a grand suite in one of the turrets of the Chateau Frontenac, outside of which Pierre first spies his brother. And when the brothers finally talk properly face to face, following their encounter at the sauna (described below), the meeting takes place in the revolving restaurant atop the Hilton, which has a 360-degree view of the city.

These associations, ironically, far from signalling the queer character's reverse panopticism, his ability to return and thereby subvert the minoritizing gaze of heteronormativity, actually position him metonymically even further as the disciplined object of that gaze. In order to understand this, we need to examine more carefully the scene at the gay sauna, where Pierre finally tracks down Marc. The scene begins at dusk, with an exterior shot of the nondescript, opaquely windowed building, isolated on a lonely and deserted expanse of street. Pierre enters

Figure 1 Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau) makes his way through the sauna.

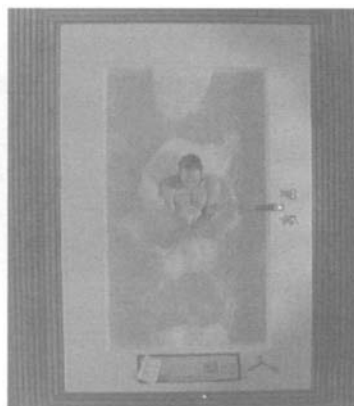Figure 2 Marc (Patrick Goyette) in foetal position. *Le Confessional* (Robert Lepage, 1995).

the frame, pausing to look sideways along the street before crossing it to enter the building. But for the absence of the requisitely suspenseful music and maybe some lower-key lighting, it is a classic film noir sequence, one usually meant to bestir anxiety in the viewer for the detective-hero who has come to investigate a mysterious lead: who on earth would come here; what dangers lurk behind those doors? In the lobby Pierre is greeted by a wary front desk clerk, who surveys his scrutiny of the Tom of Finland drawings and the sign-in list with mild disdain, commenting to Pierre that no one in their right mind would use their real name at a gay sauna – a reminder of the continued need for anonymity in a queer sexual space still subject to raids by the police. Hence the double coding of the goldfish bowl on the clerk's counter, into which Pierre peers upon entering the sauna: placing oneself on display inside such a space is potentially subject to exterior surveillance as well. As if to bear this out, once Pierre has found his room and changed into his towel, the camera begins to track his search for Marc from an overhead angle, pulling back panoptically to reveal, through the wire mesh atop their cubicles, all that the men are getting up to (which is not much, admittedly) below (figure 1). The guarantee of anonymity no longer holds in this space. The queer male body, even when it does not want to be found out, will be exposed and put on display by Lepage's all-seeing camera, as when, at the end of this scene, the outline of Marc's naked body emerges from the steam to be framed alongside his brother's towelled one in the doorway to the shower area.

Lepage's panoptical framing of this gay sauna scene might not seem so significant were it not for the fact that he employs a similar overhead camera angle three more times throughout the course of the film; each time it is Marc's body being framed by the shot (figures 2–4). The first instance takes place at the same sauna; Marc has retreated there after being told by Pierre in the previous scene that, according to a nosy aunt, the reason Rachel killed herself was because the father of her baby was a priest. Again, the camera is looking down through the grille atop a cubicle, this time capturing a naked Marc curled up in the foetal position. The second instance occurs in the limousine that will take Marc and Massicotte to the airport and their flight to Japan; there, in the back seat, with the camera looking down through the open sun roof, Massicotte prepares to correct Pierre's previous misinformation, and tell Marc the

Figure 3 Massicotte (Jean-Louis Millete) and Marc (Patrick Goyette) outside the motel.

Figure 4 Marc's suicide. *Le Confessionnal* (Robert Lepage, 1995).

16 Obviously, my reading of Lepage's panoptical camera and the disciplined queer male body in *Le Confessionnal* owes much to Foucault's analysis of the Benthamite panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1977). In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously reads the seventeenth-century confession as one of the sites of the production of a discourse of sexuality, arguing that this 'unrelenting system of confession' puts 'sex into discourse' by '[compelling] individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity – no matter how extreme'; see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: an Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), p. 61.

truth about his parentage. The last of these overhead shots records Marc's suicide in Japan; standing up in the sunken bathtub, the blood from his slashed wrists trickling down his body, Marc falls backwards into the water, and the camera tracks back quickly to reveal an aerial shot of his submersion just as the jacuzzi jets begin and the water starts turning red. All three shots occur just after or just prior to Marc receiving crucial information about his family, and about his own place within that sphere; their combined imagistic weight adds up to a positioning of the queer male as forever outside – *even when inside* – the bourgeois family, to the point of Marc's ultimate self-disciplining of his own body through the act of suicide.

Something similar happens in terms of Massicotte's association with another Foucauldian space of sexual self-disciplining, namely the confession box.[16] Early on in the film, during one of the 1952 flashback scenes, Massicotte is shown hearing Rachel's confession. The young priest is receiving news that, like the information received by Montgomery Clift's Father Logan from the killer, Keller, in *I Confess*, he must keep secret because of the seal of the confessional, but that, paradoxically, will have the effect of framing each priest for a crime he did not commit. This points to how the confessional, far from being a space that disciplines the congregation (as its prominent presence within the nave of most churches is meant to), in this case serves to frame and discipline Massicotte, his extended time within its confines with a now visibly pregnant Rachel coming to serve as evidence, in the congregation's mind, of his guilt-by-association. The grille that separates Rachel from Father Massicotte in the confessional box, like the grille above the cubicles in the gay sauna, becomes a symbol of the social constraints faced by the queer male when placed in the context of a later flashback scene. Massicotte, under pressure from his clerical superiors to resign, visits Rachel at home to beg her to reveal that he is not the father of her child. Rachel refuses to let him in, and he is forced to speak to her through the grille of the doorframe. It is a striking visual representation

of Massicotte's own imprisonment and a reminder, within the context of what the audience knows about him from the 1989 narrative, that there would be another way for him to prove to the congregation that he is not Rachel's lover: by declaring that he is homosexual.

Of course, it is really no choice at all. Either way, Massicotte would be forced to leave the priesthood. In this respect, Lepage's film represents, as Garrity suggests, a far more 'ruthless' updating of Hitchcock's film, in which 'the self-contained Jansenistic priest of *I Confess* who escapes punishment despite his own inaction is transformed by Lepage into one who suffers humiliation and degradation, never succeeding in rehabilitating himself with his church or parishioners'.[17] This is a reminder that there is another queer male 'framed' within Lepage's film: Montgomery Clift. Although he appears as Father Logan only in one brief excerpted scene from *I Confess*, the flashing of his name on the screen-within-the screen at the start of Lepage's film necessarily interpolates him as a crucial absent presence throughout *Le Confessionnal*. As Deleuze notes at one point in his discussion of the crystal-image, the film within the film 'has often been linked to the consideration of a surveillance, an investigation, a revenge, a conspiracy, a plot'.[18] In the case of Clift's role as the tortured priest in *I Confess*, who is not only unable to declare his innocence of murder but who is also unable to return the love of the female protagonist, Anne Baxter, one site of surveillance must necessarily be the actor's own sexuality. Clift's equally tortured life offscreen is a reminder that the closet is as powerful a space of self-disciplining as the confessional. That Lepage consigns to the closet the queer male protagonist of the play that inspired his next film thus bears further analysis.

Lepage's second film, *Le Polygraphe* (1997), is based on the play of the same name he cowrote and costarred in alongside longtime collaborator Marie Brassard. It premiered in Quebec City in a French-language production directed by Lepage in May 1988. The play was subsequently produced in an English translation in Toronto in February 1990. It is this latter version which Lepage chose to have tour the world, as well as to be published.[19] For the film version, however, Lepage reverted to French dialogue, but not before radically revisioning and revising the original script.

The play focuses on the complex interrelationships between three characters. David is a criminologist who escaped from East Berlin and now works at a forensics institute in Montreal. He meets Lucie, an actress from Quebec City, when they witness a suicide in a Metro station. Lucie has just been cast as the murder victim in a film based on an actual unsolved case, for which François, her gay neighbour, remains the prime suspect. François maintains that he is innocent, and has taken a lie detector test to prove it, but the police assert that the results were inconclusive, and their continued harassment, together with their failure to find the real murderer, eventually drive him to take his own life (also by jumping in front of a subway train). Meanwhile, the audience learns

17 Garrity, 'Robert Lepage's cinema of time and space', p. 103.

18 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 77.

19 See Marie Brassard and Robert Lepage, *Polygraph*, trans. Gyllian Raby, in Alan Filewod (ed.), *The CTR Anthology: Fifteen Plays from Canadian Theatre Review* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

that David has his own secrets: not only did he leave a former lover behind when he escaped to the West, but, in the play's penultimate scene, it is revealed that he was the one who both administered the polygraph to François *and* planted the seeds of doubt within him about the validity of his testimony.

Early on in the play, David boldly states that 'the body never lies',[20] although what Michael Sidnell has identified as the 'instrumental' operations of 'somatic truth' in this play relate as much – if not more – to what sexual acts François voluntarily chooses to have performed upon his own body as they do to what was involuntarily visited upon the body of the murder victim, Marie-Claude Légaré, whom we are told was raped before being repeatedly stabbed.[21] That is, the play version of *Le Polygraphe* makes it clear that François, who is both gay and a masochist, is the subject of a police investigation in part because of his perceived 'criminal' sexuality, and that his feelings of self-doubt derive in no small measure from the shame he is made to feel in confessing to the police – and, tangentially, to Lucie – the pleasure he gets from pain. This autocritique is largely absent from Lepage's film adaptation, which shifts the hermeneutics of truth, as applied to the queer male body, from detection to cover-up.

To this end, the all-important polygraph scene, which closes the play, opens the film, a temporal relocation that spatially abstracts the forensic thrust of the action that follows. Specifically, Lepage uses the opening credit sequence to capture, with diagnostic precision, François's (Patrick Goyette) head, torso, arms and fingers being attached to all manner of wires and electrodes (figure 5), as well as, through time lapse dissolves, the prosthetic record of his responses to the questions put to him by the technician Hans (James Hyndman). We later learn that Hans an old friend of Christof (Peter Stormare), the film's reworked version of the David character from the play. What is significant about how this scene

20 Ibid., p. 652.
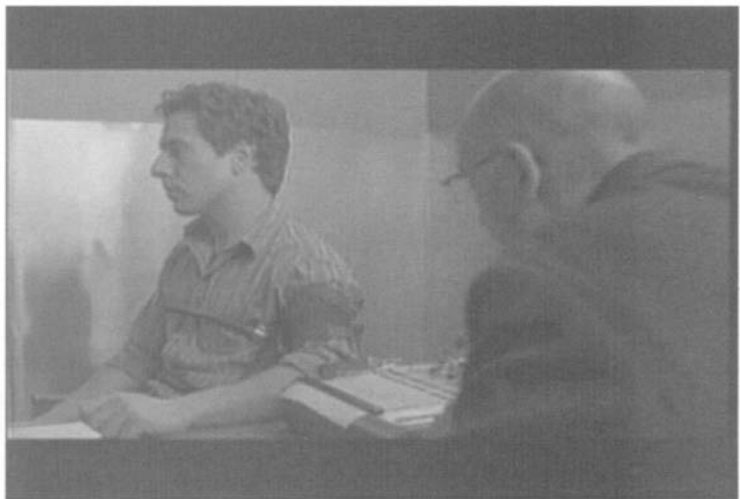
21 See Michael Sidnell, 'Polygraph: somatic truth and the art of presence', *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 64 (Fall 1990), pp. 45–8.

Figure 5 François (Patrick Goyette) taped to the polygraph machine. *Le Polygraphe* (Robert Lepage, 1997).

22 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 77.

has been adapted for film, apart from who is asking the questions this time round and the fact that Lepage once again employs a series of overhead shots to frame François's body, is that the audience not only witnesses François's self-declaration of innocence at the start of the film's narrative diegesis (rather than at the close of the play's), but in effect has 'objective' corroboration of this in the form of the polygraph needle's steady and unwavering movement over the printout being monitored by Hans. Whereas in the play the audience is left to wonder about the *othered* François's innocence or guilt until the very end, Lepage's film works to solicit spectators' identification with the character from its opening frames, thereby transferring the weight of narrative suspense to the question of who *other* than François is responsible for Marie-Claire's (Marie-Christine Le Huu) murder. Here, again, the presence of a film within a film serves as an important 'mode of the crystal-image'.[22] And yet, while the scenes documenting the making, editing and broadcast of Judith's (Josée Deschênes) film about Marie-Claire's murder do, in the end, resolve the generic conspiracy at the heart of Lepage's crime drama – by revealing, eventually, the identity of the murderer – they also perpetuate further conspiracies relating to gender by confirming that the only alibi François ever needed was his heterosexuality.

Among the changes made in the film version of *Le Polygraphe*, is the addition of a back story absent from the play that informs the spectator that not only were François and Marie-Claire lovers who had quarreled the night of her murder, but that while she was seeking comfort from her best friend, Judith, he was getting drunk in a bar, allowing himself to be picked up by Marie-Claire's sister, Claude (Maria de Medeiros), with whom he had had a previous affair. In scenes of double parallel montage near its conclusion, the film cuts from Judith and François talking about the night of the murder in her Montreal editing studio to Lucie (Marie Brassard) showing Claude the empty apartment of François in Quebec City, and from shots of Judith's film's ultimately false intradiegetic reconstruction of the murder (she blames the police) to Claude's flashbacks of what really happened: in a fit of jealousy she had stabbed her sister and set fire to her apartment. In other words, in the film François's relative gender normativity gets him off, relative in the sense that the film does at the very least indicate that the erotic basis of François and Marie-Claire's relationship was partially informed by S/M sexual practices.

In a scene just prior to François's departure for Montreal, Lucie confronts him in his bathroom about what she has learned about his relationship with Marie-Claire during the making of Judith's film; he tells her that she does not know everything, and proceeds to blindfold her and tie her hands to the washbasin with a leather belt (figure 6). He then says that he sometimes tied up Marie-Claire when they made love, before hitting and breaking the bathroom mirror in rage. And yet, even here, the scene is presented as a relatively sanitized version of the one from the

play upon which it is based, not least because of the hiding, or covering up, of the queer male body, as well as the transferring of the belt from a signifier of male masochism to one of male sadism. In the play, François explains to Lucie that one of the functions of the belt is as a device for auto-asphyxiation during masturbation. He then ties Lucie, like her screen surrogate, to the washbasin. However, in the ensuing dialogue he informs Lucie that, in the case of his own sexual practices, he is invariably the person being tied up. Furthermore, this confession to Lucie, delivered in French, is simultaneously translated for the audience into English by David, who, it soon becomes clear, is actually reading from a transcript of François's police interrogation in connection with the murder of Marie-Claude. By contrast, in Lepage's film version of *Le Polygraphe* we never witness François divulging his sexual secrets to anyone other than Lucie, and even then they serve not so much to demonstrate his vulnerability as to confirm his power.

In the end, the queer male body in *Le Polygraphe* is most hidden when it is most exposed. It is important to note that in addition to the insertion of the crucial back story noted above, there are several key shots of actor Patrick Goyette's back in the film. In this, *Le Polygraphe* is linked metonymically to *Le Confessionnal* not only through the casting of Goyette in the respective roles of François and Marc, but also in terms of how, in both films, the actor's naked body is framed by the camera. Just as in *Le Confessionnal* Lepage uses a series of panoptical top shots during key scenes featuring Marc, so he shoots François from above not only during the opening polygraph/credit sequence, but also during another scene early on in *Le Polygraphe*. François is in the bath, bent forward with his head between his knees, so that all we see of his body is the smooth and unblemished expanse of his naked back (figure 7). The camera lingers clinically, forensically, as if searching for something

Figure 7 François (Patrick Goyette) in the bath. *Le Polygraphe* (Robert Lepage, 1997).
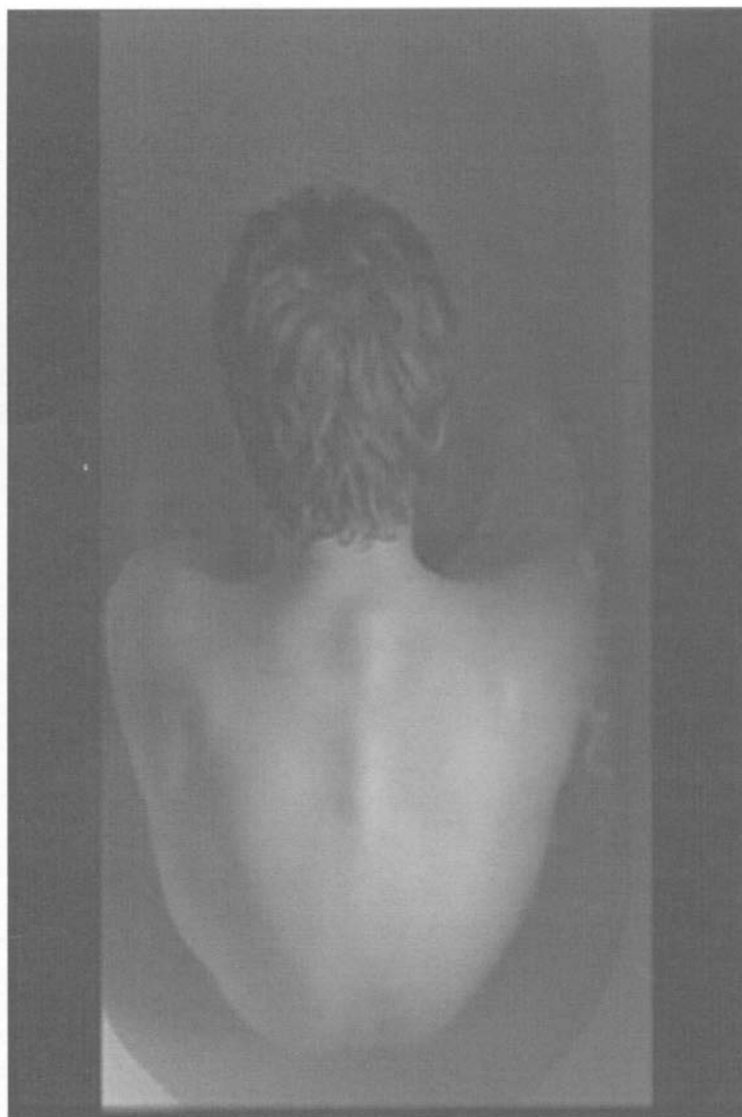
embedded upon the skin, a scratch or bump or bruise that might betray a secret that evaded detection by the polygraph machine. But the François of Lepage's film has nothing to hide, unlike, say, Christof, who bears the burden of guilt in the film *vis-à-vis* a betrayal of heteronormativity when we discover that the wife he abandoned in East Berlin has committed suicide now that the Wall has come down. And unlike the François of Lepage's play, whom we witness, in a scene titled 'The Flesh', entering a 'crowded gay bar', being 'propositioned to have sex in a private room', kneeling against a wall, removing 'his shirt . . . his belt . . . which he gives away': 'He turns his back, and unzips his pants. As he is beaten, with

23 Brassard and Lepage, *Polygraph*,
pp. 657–8. Ellipses in original.

each sound of the whiplash, François physically recoils against the wall. La petite morte and collapse, finally, the exchange is finished. Satisfied, soul weary, François gathers his clothes and his shreds of self-esteem.'[23]

A comparison of the play and film versions of *Le Polygraphe* yields two very different images of François. Both solicit the (male) viewer's gaze, but whereas the screen François invites identification (including erotic identification), the stage François effects only alienation. How can this phenomenon be explained? One way is in terms of gender, with the theatrical representation of the queer male body's excessive 'anti-naturalness' and passive acquiescence to the performed lie distancing the (stage) actor from the (stage) role, and with the cinematic representation of the straight male body's proximate 'realism' and active mastery of the embodied truth making obsolete the distinction between (social) actor and (social) role. In other words, heterosexuality is not dependent upon illusion or artifice: it just exists. So too with cinema, and another way of explaining the differences between the two François is in terms of the *form* or *medium* of the representation of each's body. As Steven Shaviro has noted in discussing the differences between theatre and film, whereas theatrical spectatorship depends for its effect on 'the physical presence of the actors' bodies in space', cinematic spectatorship replaces bodies with images, physical space with virtual space, presence with absence:

> Film's virtual images do not correspond to anything actually present, but *as* images, or *as* sensations, they affect me in a manner that does not leave room for any suspension of my response. . . . The cinematic image, in its violent more-than-presence, is at the same time immediately an absence: a distance too great to allow for dialectical interchange or for any sort of possession.[24]

24 Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic
Body* (Minneapolis, MN:
University of Minnesota Press,
1993), pp. 44, 46.

Given Shaviro's comments, it is hardly surprising that a reading of the shifting representations of the queer male body in Lepage's third film, *Nô*, should likewise depend on looking at how that body has been fatally disposed of in the process of adaptation from stage to screen. Shot with super-16 mm film in seventeen days, *Nô* is based on Section 5 ('The Words') of *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*. The play, which in its epic entirety comprises seven parts staged over seven successive hours, was developed collaboratively over a three-year period with the members of Ex Machina, and subsequently toured to more than twenty-five different locations around the world. Its plot spans fifty years, moves back and forth in time and space between Japan, the United States and Europe, incorporates over fifty different speaking roles in four different languages (English, French, Japanese and German), and employs all manner of meta-representational devices to foreground the processes of spectatorship and cultural mediation. Even more boldly, *Seven Streams* also attempts to make political and historical sense of such cataclysmic world events as the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and AIDS in terms of a recurring set of aesthetic oppositions: between East and West, life and death, tragedy and comedy, masculine and feminine.

Wisely, Lepage narrowed his scope for the eighty-five-minute *Nô*. In the film, he has chosen to focus on Sophie (Anne-Marie Cadieux), a Québécoise actress starring in a production of a Feydeau farce as part of Canada's cultural programme at the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan. Sophie, with the aid of Hanako (Marie Brassard), a blind Japanese translator attached to the show, has just learned she is pregnant. She is not sure if the father is her costar, François-Xavier (Éric Bernier), or her boyfriend, Michel (Alexis Martin), a writer who, back in Montreal, has suddenly been thrust into the thick of the October Crisis thanks to an unexpected visit by radical friends intent on planting a bomb. While Sophie finds herself embroiled in her own bedroom farce when she drunkenly sleeps with Walter (Richard Fréchette), the Canadian cultural attache in Tokyo, Michel labours over the wording of the political message that will be attached to his friends' bomb, whose detonator, he soon discovers, has been incorrectly set. The two narratives, whose temporal and spatial distinctiveness had previously been signposted by having the scenes in Montreal filmed in black and white and the scenes in Japan in colour, merge during a key scene in which Sophie, returning from Japan to discover only rubble where her home once stood, is arrested by Agents Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Ménard (Jules Philip), plain-clothes detectives who had been keeping her and Michel's apartment under surveillance. Not only does the shift from black and white to colour that occurs during the middle of this scene chromatically connect the intradiegetic media footage of the 1980 Québec referendum results that follows in the film's epilogue with similar intradiegetic footage of Pierre Trudeau being interviewed about introducing the War Measures Act to deal with the FLQ in the 1970s used at the start of the film; its resulting focalization of the spectator's gaze on the blood flowing down Sophie's legs as a result of the miscarriage brought on by her arrest serves as a syntagma that connects the various overlapping discourses of nationalism and sexuality throughout the film (figure 8).

In an earlier scene in the film, the police officers arresting Sophie are explicitly depicted as duplicitous, not only in terms of their collaboration with the state by spying on their nationalist brothers but also in terms of attempting to hide the true nature of their domestic *ménage*. Staking out Michel and Sophie's apartment from what they believe is an unoccupied apartment across the street, the police are interrupted by the landlady, who wants to show the place to a pair of prospective tenants. While Bélanger attempts to keep her at bay by blocking the door, Ménard quickly hides their surveillance equipment on the floor, covering it with the roll-out cot from the sofabed, upon which he promptly installs himself in a languorous pose (figure 9). This is how Lepage and André Morency's script describes the ensuing shot sequence:

> Pushing against [Bélanger], the landlady enters energetically and stops just as quickly when she sees the other police officer stretched out on the hide-a-bed. Believing she's dealing with a homosexual couple, she

Figure 8 Sophie (Anne-Marie Cadieux) miscarries as she is arrested by Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Menard (Jules Philip). *Nô* (Robert Lepage, 1998).
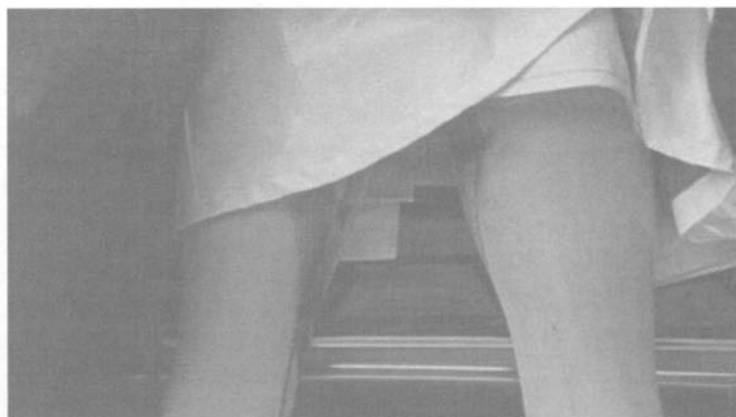
25 Robert Lepage and André Morency, *Nô* (Laval and Montreal: Les 400 Coups/Alliance Vivafilm, 1998), p. 57. My translation.

gives them a dirty look. Under the same impression about the sexual identity of the cops, the visitors, themselves homosexuals, exchange knowing looks, attempting to establish a complicity that singularly embarrasses the representatives of the forces of order.[25]

The scene, like most in the film, is played for laughs, and in a social satire of the sort directed here by Lepage one should be wary of critiquing broad stereotypes employed for comic effect. Still, within the context of the long-entrenched symbolic associations of homosexuality in Québécois culture that I have been sketching throughout this essay, it is hard not to take away a familiar message. The queer male body being overwritten with/by the 'forces of order' in this scene means, concomitantly, that it cannot also be linked with the forces of revolution and change. Hence the image of a gay couple blithely out shopping for an apartment while all around them the world is exploding. This also explains why the queer 'self-abortion', that in some senses constitutes

Figure 9 Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Ménard (Jules Philip) are interrupted by the concierge. *Nô* (Robert Lepage, 1998).

26 Christopher Gittings reads Lepage's cut 'from a low-angled close-up shot of blood running down the inside of Sophie's legs to Sophie and Michel watching television coverage of the results of the May 1980 Referendum' somewhat differently, arguing that it constitutes Lepage's 'rather heavy-handed point about the failure of Québécois separatists to carry the embryonic Québec nation to full term.' See Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 191.

27 Lepage and Morency, *Nô*, p. 87. My translation.

28 Ibid. My translation.

29 Ibid., p. 89. My translation.

30 In an important article examining the 'tragic resiliency' of various homophobic tropes that have helped fuel a 'profound sexual anxiety in Québec's anticolonial discourse', Robert Schwartzwald has analyzed the jokes about '*fédérastes*' that routinely appeared in the back pages of the journal *parti pris* in the 1960s. As Schwartzwald explains, *parti pris*'s punning link between federalism and pederasty implies that Québec's national self-interests have been perverted and corrupted by a predatory and ultimately non-productive English-Canadian system. See his 'Fear of federasty: Québec's inverted fictions', in Hortense J. Spillers (ed.), *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), pp. 176, 178.

Sophie's miscarriage at the hands of these same police officers, is in cinematic terms absolutely necessary.[26]

I do not wish to indict Lepage for his failure to produce positive images of queerness here or elsewhere in his cinema. Rather, to come back to the ambivalent heterogeneity of Deleuze's time-image, I want to suggest that the virtual traces of national memory in Lepage's films, and Québécois cinema generally, are in part sustained by a willed sexual amnesia in the actual present, whereby a 'teleological vision' of progress paradoxically preserves a heteronormative link between past repression and future liberation. Here, it is worth examining more closely the conclusion of *Nô*, which flashes forward from October 1970 to 20 May 1980, the night of Québec's first referendum on sovereignty-association. As Sophie and a newly-yuppified Michel watch dispiritedly the television results confirming a victory for the 'No' side, Michel expounds upon his theory that 'people with a collective project are always a little disadvantaged next to people who don't have a project … The idea is that it always takes more energy to change political institutions, social institutions than … to do nothing'.[27] To Sophie's response that the 'common project' of the No side in the referendum must surely be the idea of a unified Canada, Michel scoffs that 'It's a bit static as a project, isn't it?'.[28] He then suggests that perhaps he and Sophie need a common project, something that looks to 'posterity', something like a child. Incredulous, Sophie asks him whether he would have considered that a worthy 'common project' ten years earlier, at the start of their relationship. Michel replies that it wouldn't have been the same thing ten years ago: 'we were occupied with changing the world. … Times have changed.'[29] The scene ends with Sophie – who clearly intends not to tell Michel about her earlier failed pregnancy – gradually acceding to Michel's increasingly amorous arguments, assenting to the idea of a baby in an escalating series of percentages – she goes from being 40.5% sure, to 49%, to 50%, and then finally 50.5% – that mirror the closeness of the numbers for and against sovereignty in Québec's second referendum.

Indeed, it is impossible not to read this scene in light of the events of 1995. The film's release date of 1998, combined with the appearance of Jean Chrétien as a talking head on some of the television footage shown of the 1980 referendum, ensures that Sophie and Michel's conversation will resonate with both Québécois and English-Canadian audiences. Not least because of the discourse surrounding reproduction that emerged over the course of the 1995 campaign, with sovereigntist leaders like Lucien Bouchard and Jacques Parizeau urging *pure laine* Québécois to do their bit to reverse the plummeting provincial birthrate in order to offset, among other things, the inevitable antinationalist consequences of 'les votes ethniques' and, by extension, 'les votes *fédérastes*'.[30] This confluence of discourses of racial and sexual difference within the context of Québec self-determination leads us back to *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* and explains, paradoxically, why Sophie's miscarriage is, in some respects, inevitable.

31 Robert Lepage and Ex Machina, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (London: Methuen, 1996), p. 147.

In the narrative universe of the play, the child that results from Sophie's pregnancy is both a born *fédéraste* and a future queer libertine, the product of his mother's drunken liaison with the Canadian diplomatic toady Walter, and, as such, voracious in his pursuit and consumption of new experiences and pleasures, different cultures and genders. Indeed, when he should be back in Québec performing his nationalist duty by voting in the referendum, the Pierre of *Seven Streams* is actually in Japan learning to dance like a woman: one of the last images we see in the play is of him dressed in a Japanese wedding kimono, his face covered in white makeup, '[performing] a butoh dance in which a woman moves gracefully, then experiences a moment of terror and pain'.[31] Is it any wonder that such an image is excised from the film version of *Nô*? In the 'common project' that is the Québec national imaginary, the queer male body is, fundamentally, disposable. Like the Oriental body, it functions as an arrested Other against which to measure the normative progress of an autonomous selfhood; but, also like the Oriental body, it is, in the end, unassimilable. This, to some extent, explains the fate of the queer male body in Lepage's next film, *Possible Worlds* (2000).

Possible Worlds opens with the camera focusing, from the inside, on a window cleaner (Griffith Brewer) who is busy washing, from the outside, the floor-to-ceiling windows of a trendy condominium loft. As the soap suds are gradually wiped away by the deft strokes of his squeegee, the window cleaner is able to see inside the condo, whereupon he makes a shocking discovery: the dead body of its owner splayed across the sofa. We then cut to the arrival of Detective Berkley (Sean McCann) at the scene, who learns from his partner, Williams (Rick Miller), who the murder victim is – George Barber (Tom McCamus), a successful stockbroker – as well as what makes this particular crime so gruesome: the killer has neatly sawn off the top part of his victim's skull and absconded with the brain. Although Lepage's fourth film, *Possible Worlds* is his first shot in English. And, while the film is based on a previously staged work of drama, it is not, this time, one by Lepage. Instead, he is adapting John Mighton's 1992 play of the same name. However, a brief analysis of the plot and structure of Mighton's play reveals some familiar Lepage themes, including the parallelling and overlapping of different temporal and spatial realms, the mourning of a lost love object, and the unravelling of a mystery whose solution is in some fundamental sense beyond imagination.

In the case of *Possible Worlds*, this mystery concerns not just who stole George's brain and why, but also the exact nature of his relationship with his wife Joyce (Tilda Swinton). To summarize, both the play and film, like all of Lepage's films, follow two (at the very least) separate narrative temporalities, flashing back from the opening scene described above to trace the initial meeting, courtship and, it is briefly suggested, subsequent estrangement of George and Joyce. But even here, in the flashback narrative, there are further diegetic layers. In one version of events, George and Joyce meet in the cafeteria of the hospital where she

works as a research biologist, or rather re-meet, as it soon becomes clear that they are from the same small town in Northern Ontario. In another possible scenario that both theatre and film audiences witness, the couple meet in a crowded downtown bar, as a coquettish Joyce, who now seems to work as a stockbroker in the same office as George, aggressively pursues a liaison. These scenes, and others documenting further stages in the couple's twin relationships, are repeated throughout the play and film, dramatizing what George describes to Joyce at one point as the metaphysical romance of human interconnection, that 'each of us exists in an infinite number of possible worlds'.[32] Meanwhile, in the present tense of the crime narrative, the play and film's other couple, Berkley and Williams, who kibbutz, cajole and generally annoy each other like an old married couple, trace the theft of George's brain to a Doctor Penfield, renamed Doctor Keiber in the film (Gabriel Gascon), a neurologist who has been stockpiling the cerebella of very intelligent and powerful people as a way of 'extracting information from them'.[33] As Penfield puts it to Berkley early on in the play: 'Everything you think, Inspector, even the most trivial fantasy, leaves a trace, a disturbance in that field. I'm trying to learn how to control those disturbances.'[34]

What, one might ask, has any of this to do with representations of the queer male body? Arguably nothing and everything. That is, George's fantasies of heterosexual happiness with Joyce, who may or may not be the same 'wife' whom George repeatedly claims died three years ago in another of his possible lives, would depend, following from Judith Butler's theories of gender melancholia, on the trace signs of another 'disturbing' fantasy that he has repudiated, namely homosexuality. In other words, Doctor Penfield/Keiber might not be the only one trying to 'control' George's imagination. George's own obsessive replaying of his life with Joyce — which is only ever presented as but one of a number of *possible* scenarios — might betray certain anxieties around the equally possible 'fictiveness' of his presumed heterosexual gender. But what images of the queer male body are there in Lepage's film to support such a claim? None other, I would argue, than that of George's corpse.

Monique Wittig has argued that 'the straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality, represents its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality.'[35] Likewise, Butler has theorized normative heterosexual gender identification as a kind of melancholia in which unresolved same-sex desire is internalized as a prohibition that precedes the incest taboo.[36] Homosexuality, in other words, is, to use terminology borrowed from two other classic essays by Wittig, nothing more than a 'fiction', but a necessary one, whose symbolic otherness helps constitute and maintain the 'heterosexual contract'.[37] Structuring the various versions of George and Joyce's marriage contract throughout Lepage's film is another 'possible world', another window of gender identification, made available to the spectator in its opening minutes. As Detectives Berkley and Williams circle George's corpse looking for evidence and a

32 John Mighton, *Possible Worlds* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1988), p. 23.

33 Ibid., p. 27.

34 Ibid., p. 26.

35 Monique Wittig, 'The straight mind', in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 28.
36 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 63 ff; *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), pp. 235–6 ff; *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).
37 Wittig, 'The mark of gender', pp. 76–89, and 'On the social contract', in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, pp. 33–45.

motive for the crime, and thus policing to a certain extent our generic reading of the scene, Lepage's camera swoops down from the upper reaches of the loft, lingering almost pornographically over the body of actor Tom McCamus, splayed across the back of his sofa, shirt front open to the waist, a look of absolute ecstasy on his face (figure 10). In short, George is made into an object of desire for the viewer, even if only clinical desire, *and regardless of the gender of that viewer.* And here our screen surrogates are none other than the homothetical couple of Berkley and Williams, whose close inspection of George's body, the camera makes clear, is lovingly professional. If, in Butler's and Wittig's readings of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, homosexual cathexis must precede ego identification and the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, then this is the scene in Lepage's film that performs most spectacularly that rupture, and that perforce haunts our reading of all subsequent images in the film, especially those involving George.

To this end, it is important to note that the opening image of George's body draped provocatively across his sofa is repeated once more in the film; this time, however, George wakes up, to the realization that he is merely suffering from a massive hangover, and that he has just slept with Joyce #2, the stockbroker. Moreover, consider the opening scene as I have discussed it in relation to the speech by Joyce #1 that closes both the play and the film:

> The word 'not' is really magical. I could describe something and say – 'But it's *not* that, it's something more' – and you'd know what I meant. It's a way of getting around our ignorance. . . . We say 'Things might not have been the way they are', and feel free or uneasy. But there's really nothing behind it. Just a bunch of ghostly possibilities. Because, in the end, everything simply is.[38]

38 Mighton, *Possible Worlds*, p. 74.

My argument about the absent presence of images of the queer male body in Lepage's film adaptation of *Possible Worlds* likewise coalesces around this interdictive word. Homosexuality is what is 'not' in our

Figure 10 George (Tom McCamus) found dead at the film's start. *Possible Worlds* (Robert Lepage, 2000).

39 On the 'heterosexual matrix', see
Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 35–
78. On the specific ghosting of
lesbianism in modern literary and
cinematic culture, Terry Castle and
Patricia White have both written
perceptively. See Terry Castle, *The
Apparitional Lesbian: Female
Homosexuality and Modern
Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia
University Press, 1993); Patricia
White, *Uninvited: Classical
Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian
Representability* (Bloomington, IN:
Indiana University Press, 1999).

culture; it's the ghost in the machine, of the 'heterosexual matrix' generally, but also of the matrix of cinema more specifically.[39] In other words, take away the straight mind and what you are left with is the queer body. Arguably, this is what we are left with in Lepage's most recent film. Only this time, that body is incarnated on screen by the auteur himself.

Winner of the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize in the Panorama Series at the 2004 Berlin International Film Festival and a Canadian Genie Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, Lepage's fifth film, *La Face cachée de la lune* (2003), is shot in high-definition video. An adaptation of his award-winning solo play of the same name, the film is set against the backdrop of the US–Soviet space race and current investigations into extraterrestrial life. Jumping back and forth in time between the 1950s and the present day, the narrative through-line concerns the complicated relationship between two Quebec City brothers, Philippe and André (both played by Lepage), and their different responses to the death of their mother (played in flashbacks by a mute Anne-Marie Cadieux). Not only is *La Face* Lepage's most personal memorial film to date (the impetus for the source play came from the death of his own mother), and not only does it mark his debut as an actor in one of his own films, it also sees Lepage, as director, consciously quoting from his previous work. Indeed, one important scene crucially revises and reorients the scopic regime of queer male images on offer in Lepage's previous films. Let me conclude this essay by very briefly explaining how this works.

The theme of narcissism runs throughout *La Face*. Most prominently, it serves as the theoretical cornerstone of Philippe's twice-rejected PhD thesis in the philosophy of science, which argues that the US and Soviet space programmes were fuelled not by the desire to seek out and explore new worlds, but rather to claim and remake those worlds in each country's national and ideological image. As for Philippe's own self-image, it has been shaped by childhood memories and battered by adult failures. Still living in the old family apartment, surrounded by his dead mother's clothes and shoes, he is unkempt and socially inept, reduced to taking on a series of menial and underpaid jobs while he revises his thesis. Even his one shot at academic stardom he manages to sabotage; having been invited to present his research at a conference in Moscow, he sleeps through his scheduled panel. Meanwhile, younger brother André could not be more different. A self-absorbed and pompous weatherman, he lives in a trendy and well-appointed new condo overlooking the harbour with his equally well-appointed boyfriend, Carl (Marco Poulin). André is the stereotyped embodiment of gay male narcissism, obsessed with surface appearances – his own and others'. However, just when it looks like Lepage is in danger of recycling classic homophobic tropes from Hollywood cinema, he inverts this process by exposing his own body to the minoritizing gaze of the camera.

In a very funny scene midway through the film, Philippe, having put in a desultory workout at a local gym, suddenly finds himself sharing a
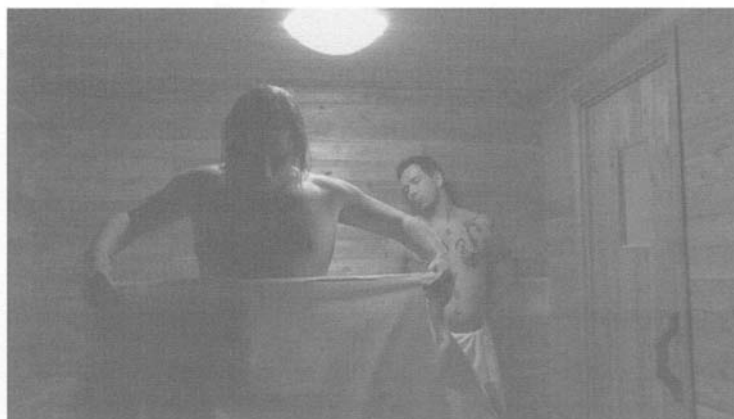
sauna with Carl. Never having met his brother's boyfriend, Philippe misinterprets Carl's friendly grin and casually provocative legs-splayed pose as a cruise, and rapidly rushes to declare his heterosexual credentials. It is only at this point that Carl reveals his own identity, noting that he immediately recognized Philippe as André's brother owing to the family resemblance. Thereafter, the two men fall into a casual conversation about work, with Philippe surprised at Carl's interest in his research. What I find most interesting about this scene is how it subtly revises the epistemology of surveillance that governs the sauna scene in *Le Confessionnal*. Not only is it the straight male who is required to out himself in this space, but it is his body which is subjected to both Carl's and the camera's voyeuristic gaze (see figure 11). That the body is here framed in medium closeups and a shot/reverse-shot sequence of edits, rather than via the overhead tracking shots used in *Le Confessionnal*, also forces us to consider exactly who is policing whom in *La Face*. In the sexualized space of the sauna, Philippe's overweight, out-of-shape and pale straight body, when juxtaposed against Carl's tauter, tanned, tattooed, and pierced queer one, cannot help but be found wanting.

Moreover, both Philippe and André are played by Lepage himself, who has openly acknowledged his, at times painful, alienation from his own body (he suffers from alopecia, resulting in a complete hair loss), which would seem to authorize a reevaluation of all of his screen images of the male body. In this regard, consider *La Face*'s memorable closing shot. In it, Philippe's/Lepage's body 'floats', courtesy of blue screen technology and the director's own surprising physical agility, up out of the Moscow airport lounge where he awaits his return flight to Canada, and into the stratosphere. For me, its orbit, like Deleuze's crystal-image, splits time in two, launching Lepage's queer male body into a future as yet indiscernible but fundamentally free, at least in my estimation, of the weight of its hitherto overdetermined nationalist inscriptions.

'It's a woman!': the question of gender on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*

SU HOLMES

Amid a frenzy of media interest, in April 2003 Major Charles Ingram, his wife Diana Ingram, and their accomplice Tecwen Whittock were found guilty of conspiring to cheat on the hit quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* (Celador for ITV1, UK, 1998–). Claiming that the case was a 'story of obsession, intrigue and deception which must be told',[1] ITV1 quickly packaged the incriminating footage into the programme *Millionaire: a Major Fraud*,[2] a very lucrative venture which secured an audience of seventeen million viewers.[3] Guided by a suitably moralistic voiceover, the viewer was directed to a close visual and verbal analysis of the show, listening out for Whittock's 'cheating coughs' (used to signal to the Major which answer was correct), observing the Major's erratic selection of answers, and judging Diana Ingram's melodramatic gestures, the facial expressions and body language used to signify anguish, tension or relief as her husband 'gambled' his way to one million pounds. In the following days the footage was eagerly dissected in television programmes and newspaper columns, and it was not simply the Major's role which was under scrutiny. Diana Ingram's 'unconvincing' performance was also a topic of debate, foregrounded as evidence of the fact that, in retrospect, their machinations all seemed so obvious. *The Times* noted that it was actually Diana Ingram who was 'the plotter and pivot behind the scam'[4] – perhaps with an added sense of distaste at such 'unwomanly' ruthlessness and calculation – although on a surface level this was partly disguised by her more circumscribed role in the geography of the drama itself. Indeed, of interest here is the fact that, although Diana had previously appeared as a successful contestant on *Millionaire*, there was something predictable about the fact that the

1 Alan Hamilton, Michael Horsell and Adam Sherwin, 'Millionaire plotters thought they had the final answer', *The Times*, 8 April 2003, p. 11.

2 *Millionaire: a Major Fraud* (ITV1, tx 21 April 2003).

3 Zoe Williams, 'Where's the real crime here', *Now*, 7 May 2003, p. 72.

4 Hamilton et al., 'Millionaire plotters thought they had the final answer', p. 11.

5   My analysis here spans thirty
    editions of the programme from
    April 2001 to April 2003. It is also
    based on thirty editions of
    Millionaire Classic (ITV1), which
    are compressed reruns of the
    show from 1998–9 scheduled in
    the summer of 2003. The dates
    given for the editions of
    Millionaire Classic indicate when
    they were scheduled as the reruns
    (ITV1), as it is difficult to give the
    original transmission date.
    However, all editions cited as
    Millionaire Classic were originally
    broadcast in 1999.

6   See Bill Lewis, 'TV games: people
    as performers', in Len Masterman
    (ed.), *Television Mythologies*
    (London: Comedia, 1984), pp. 42–
    6; John Fiske, 'Quizzical
    pleasures', in *Television Culture*
    (London: Routledge, 1987), pp.
    265–80.

7   See John Tulloch, 'Gradgrind's
    heirs: the presentation of
    "knowledge" on British quiz
    shows', *Screen Education*
    (Summer 1976), pp. 3–13; Adam
    Mills and Phil Rice, 'Quizzing the
    popular', *Screen Education*, no. 41
    (Winter/Spring 1982), pp. 15–25;
    Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures'.

8   See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a
    Social Critique of the Judgement
    of Taste* (London: Routledge,
    1986).

9   See Fiske, *Television Culture*, and
    'Women and quiz shows:
    consumerism, patriarchy and
    resisting pleasures', in Mary Ellen
    Brown (ed.), *Television and
    Women's Culture: the Politics of
    the Popular* (London: Sage, 1990),
    pp. 131–43; William Boddy, 'Quiz
    shows', in Glen Creeber (ed.), *The
    Television Genre Book* (London:
    British Film Institute, 2001), pp.
    79–80.

10 Frances Bonner 'Confession time:
    women and game shows', in
    Frances Bonner, Lizabeth
    Goodman, Richard Allen, Linda
    James and Catherine King (eds),
    *Imagining Women: Cultural
    Representations and Gender*
    (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 237.

woman should play the role of registering, performing and generating the drama of the scenes. This is not simply because of the traditional equation made between femininity and emotional display, as these scenes also functioned as a kind of metacommentary on what has become the highly conventional construction of gender on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire.*

In the UK version, female contestants have been in the minority since the programme began, and it is not uncommon for all the contestants in the 'Fastest Finger First' round to be men. As a result, the most recurrent image of women on the programme has become that of the anxious, excited or ecstatic supporter, situated in the studio audience as their male partner claims the illuminated hotseat of centre stage. Historically, the patriarchal construction of the genre has been most visible in its marginalization of female hosts and, foregrounding women's status as object of exchange, their role as the assistant or hostess. (Although the dynamics may have shifted somewhat, both strategies are still apparent). However, the dearth of female contestants on a show regarded as the most successful quiz format of all time - and the impact of this on its construction of gender – raises some serious issues for feminist analysis, particularly when it has had very little to say about the sexual politics of the quiz show at all. 'It's a woman!' is the exclamation offered by the UK host Chris Tarrant when a woman does make it into the chair, a phrase which marks women as spectacle, different, special, but above all, other in the arena of *Millionaire.* The exclamation is intended to function simply as a statement of fact, but my interest here is in the discursive concept of 'woman' that the programme brings into being. In focusing on the UK version, I consider how gender is mediated in *Millionaire* through its discursive construction of family, production and consumption. A key question here is whether this highly dichotomized construction of gender roles functions to play down what (for the quiz show) may be the potentially more divisive boundaries of class.[5]

Emerging in Britain in 1998, *Millionaire* stimulated a rejuvenation of the quiz show format which, in the UK, has spanned both daytime and primetime schedules, as well as national and international formats. Yet the current centrality of the quiz show in the contemporary television landscape contrasts with its marginal role in television scholarship. Some of the most significant analyses of the genre were written in the 1970s and 1980s, and although gender was given some attention,[6] class represented the dominant interpretive framework.[7] One of the reasons the genre has found itself marginalized in television and cultural studies is because of the decline of class as the dominant locus of critical attention. As with all judgments of 'taste',[8] discourses of class have also been central to the low cultural status of the genre, although (largely because of their historically greater predominance as a daytime genre), scholars writing about the US context are more likely to foreground the importance of *gender* here.[9] As Frances Bonner suggests, quiz shows are 'variously gendered by both time of screening and by the type of game'.[10]

11 See Fiske, 'Women and quiz shows'.

12 Bonner 'Confession time', p. 237.

For example, shows involving 'everyday' or populist knowledge such as shopping skills or family management (*Supermarket Sweep, The Price is Right, Family Fortunes*)[11] have been perceived as feminine forms, while 'prime-time high-rating programmes' with 'serious' questions have been perceived as masculine forms[12] (although that is not to suggest that this is reflected in the gender composition of the contestants or home audience). These categorizations are clearly marked by discourses of cultural value when it comes to perceptions of 'men's' and 'women's' programmes. Yet in terms of scheduling, we should be wary of a simplistic dichotomy in which daytime shows are associated with women, and the primetime shows are associated with men. This does not reflect potential shifts in the composition of the daytime audience, and it seems less simple to map such a framework onto recent UK shows (daytime and primetime) ranging from *The Weakest Link* (BBC1 and BBC2, 1999–), *The National Lottery Jet Set* (BBC1, 2001–), *The Chair* (BBC1, 2002), *No Win, No Fee* (BBC1, 2001–), *The Enemy Within* (BBC1, 2002), *Beat the Nation* (C4, 2004–), or *The Vault* (ITV1, 2002–). Significantly, it is less easy to categorize these shows in terms of the more traditional gendered types indicated above.

In the context of the competitive multichannel environment, it is also clear that a show such as *Millionaire* was conceived as high-concept event or 'must-see' television for all.[13] The apparent masculinization of the UK version may simply suggest that fewer women apply to be on the show, as opposed to a disinterest in viewing the programme itself.[14] Rather than employ contestant researchers, *Millionaire* was one of the first shows to randomly select participants by computer (from the names amassed by the premium phone lines which generate the prize money for the show). The resulting gender imbalance is not evident in the other shows cited above, but the majority of these operate a sole or partial filter in 'casting' contestants where such a disparity can be readily addressed. In this respect, *Millionaire*'s random selection procedure appeared to emphasize – and create discussion around – the issue of whether women are generally less likely to apply to enter the quiz show space.

13 Peter Bazalgette, 'Big Brother and beyond', *Television* (October 2001), p. 22.

14 In fact, initial information on the demographics for the show revealed that 10% more women than men watched *Millionaire*. Mike Wayne, '*Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*: contextual analysis and the endgame of public service television', in Dan Fleming (ed.), *Formations: a 21st Century Media Studies Textbook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 215.

15 Anita Chaudhuri, 'Women: who wants to be a quiz show contestant?', *The Guardian*, 29 November 1999, p. 6.

16 Chris Tarrant, cited in Lynn Barber, 'The successful format', *The Observer*, 2 April 2000, p. 33.

17 Sheila Brownlow, Rebecca Whitener and Janet M. Rupert, 'I'll take gender differences for $1000!: domain-specific intellectual success on "Jeopardy"', *Sex Roles*, vol. 38, nos 3–4 (1998), pp. 269–85.

Guardian critic Anita Chaudhuri investigated the gendered appeal of quiz show participation, and hosts and producers from other programmes confirmed that they often have to 'make a great effort to find women'.[15] This 'effort' is in part made because women are seen as more televisually desirable in the genre. They are considered to make 'better' contestants with their perceived proclivity to be 'more emotional, more responsive [and] ready to scream with excitement'.[16] If working from the premiss that women seem more reluctant to participate in at least the general knowledge-based shows, then various explanations have been offered by both academics and journalists. Variously drawing on both 'biological' and cultural arguments, explanations range from women's lower confidence in estimating their intelligence, gendered perceptions of the appropriateness of demonstrating intellect,[17] women's judgment of

18 Judith E. Larkin, 'Gender and risk in public performance', *Sex Roles*, vol. 49, nos 5–6 (2003).

19 Ibid.

20 See Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television* (London: Sage, 2002); Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (eds), *Understanding Reality Television* (London: Routledge, 2004).

21 Chaudhuri, 'Women: who wants to be a quiz show contestant?', p. 6.

22 Edward Cohn, 'Are men's fingers fastest?', *The American Prospect*, vol. 11, no. 11 (2000). As Cohn notes, the 'grand dame' of television quiz shows, *Jeopardy!*, has long since been male-dominated in terms of the top-winning contestants, while NBC's *Twenty-One* and Fox's *Greed* have avoided this gender imbalance by casting participants.

23 Chaudhuri, 'Women: who wants to be a quiz show contestant?', p. 6.

24 Cohn, 'Are men's fingers fastest?'.

25 Tulloch, 'Gradgrind's heirs'; Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures'; Garry Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky: television, quiz and game shows and popular culture', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds), *Come on Down?: Popular Culture in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 179–201.

26 Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures', p. 266.

'risk' in public performance,[18] to the wider suggestion that men are more individualist, aggressive and competitive while women are associated with nurturing and conceived in terms of communal relations.[19]

With respect to *Millionaire*, discussion of the gender imbalance was generated in the UK and the USA at least, though this has not necessarily been evident on an international level. *Millionaire* is of course a global text circulating in over forty territories, and a key issue in approaching such high-profile formats has been precisely the relationship between the global and the local, and issues of national inflection and adaptation.[20] As discussion of host Chris Tarrant's intervention will suggest, the analysis here relates to the specificity of *Millionaire* in the British context, and while Celador retains tight control over the general rules and visual construction of the format, this is far from suggesting that its global circulation is homogenous. The UK and US versions were at least similar in instigating debate about a gender imbalance within their first year of broadcast. While Chaudhuri asked 'Women: who wants to be a quiz show contestant?',[21] a US critic noted that, 'Whatever its origins, the most interesting thing about the quiz show gender gap could be that it has been so widely noticed and discussed'.[22] (As he observed, this was notably more so than the persistence of more significant gender disparities in areas such as wages and employment opportunity.) This situation proved to be particularly problematic in the US context given its strong historical connection with the concept of an 'egalitarian' democracy and equal opportunity for all. When it came to the gender imbalance on *Millionaire*, critics tried to explain the disparity by invoking some of the arguments above. These ranged from women's 'natural reluctance to be competitive',[23] to the specificity of the game format in terms of the filter of 'Fastest Finger First' (in that men are seen to be better at fast-paced responses in reflex contexts).[24] At the same time, this still would not explain why fewer women *apply* to go on the show in the first place (although my interest here does not depend on resolving this question).

Primarily within the context of class, a key theme in critical analyses of the quiz show has been the ideological relationship between class, knowledge and success.[25] At least in terms of programmes drawing on 'factual' knowledge (general or academic), the genre has historically pivoted on the egalitarian promise of offering equal opportunity for all, which, by implication, suggests that success is obtained through 'natural' ability and/or 'luck'. As John Fiske describes, this functions as an enactment of capitalist ideology in which 'individuals are constructed as different, but equal in opportunity' – an ideology which grounds 'social or class differences in individual, natural differences and thus naturalizes the class system'.[26] The 'egalitarian' promise of *Millionaire* has been seen as hollow, given that the first three UK contestants to win the top prize could be considered advantaged in terms of education, lifestyle and

27 See Su Holmes, 'Not the final answer: revisiting critical approaches to the quiz show and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (forthcoming).

28 Euan Ferguson, '*Millionaire* – the big win', *The Observer*, 26 November 2000, p. 11.

29 Wayne, '*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*', p. 209. Wayne explains the institutional conception of the programme in more detail.

30 Colman Hutchinson, from personal interview with executive producer of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, 3 August 2003.

31 Cohn, 'Are men's fingers fastest?'.

32 Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky', p. 197.

consequent access to cultural capital.[27] As the *Observer* noted after the first UK contestant millionaire win (by Judith Keppel):

> Far from having 'dumbed down', the evening's questions seemed explicitly designed to frustrate the very Lottery classes the programme purportedly wants to win. ... If there was any 'fix' going on, it was rather the larger one that conspires still to make a private education better than a state one.[28]

While the show's ideological promise in terms of class is crucial, the programme was actually conceived as an attempt to bring more 'upmarket' viewers to a genre and channel which have historically been seen to draw predominantly older and poorer audiences. The aspirational cash sum – avoiding the class (taste) connotations of prizes – is evidence of this.[29]

But in ideological terms, the show must present itself as the 'people's show'.[30] To this end, the opening title sequence makes use of what are the more visible signifiers of gender and ethnicity, although class is also implied by including people in both formal and casual attire. Featuring a group of contestants walking zombie-like towards the illuminated logo of the programme (and by extension, its promise), by far the most prominent figures in this sequence are *women* – notably both black and white. Black or Asian contestants have been the most conspicuous absence on the show, which makes for an overwhelming predominance of white men, within which there is a fairly broad range in terms of age and occupation. This imbalance was again apparent in the US version, where this undermining of the show's egalitarian ethos was considered too problematic, and 'Fastest Finger First' was later eliminated in order to enable greater control over the selection of contestants. In one edition in February 2000, host Regis Philbin even enquired: 'Why is it that nearly all of our contestants are white men? ... We really would like a little more diversity! ... Everyone out there ... who isn't a white male – dial that 800 number and let's get into the game.'[31] While the imbalance regarding ethnicity has not been explicitly acknowledged in the UK version, what is immediately striking here is how its parade of contestants contrasts with the expectation of more diverse representations of identity deliberately fostered by other television genres – something which immediately alerts us to the ways in which the quiz show may be a space which works through more traditional forms of power. For a programme which pivots so clearly on an ideology of opportunity, the disjuncture between the imagery of the title sequence and the content of the programme itself immediately raises questions about its egalitarian promise. As Whannel has acknowledged, the 'shared culture' of quiz shows is often in many ways an 'exclusive and excluding white culture' which trades in references to a 'distinctly white past',[32] not to mention the extent to which access to educational opportunities is also often a consideration of ethnicity.

33 An example of a traditionally male question would be 'Starting with the most, put these countries in order by how many times they have won the Football World Cup'.

34 Hutchinson, personal interview, 3 August 2003.

35 *Millionaire Classic*, tx 25 July 2003.

36 Chaudhuri, 'Women: who wants to be a quiz show contestant?'.

37 Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky', p. 193.

In this respect, while gender is cut across by class and ethnicity, it is not straightforwardly a factor which undermines the ideology of 'equal opportunity' for all here. That is not to deny that knowledge is gendered, or that this is clearly evident in the show. Within the terms of traditional and dichotomous stereotypes of gender identities, women's competences may be shaped by the cultural construction of femininity (relating for example, to family, fashion, shopping) and men's to the cultural construction of masculinity (relating for example, to football, to car mechanics, and technology). In this respect, examples of gendered questions (both 'male' or 'female') are certainly in evidence on *Millionaire* – particularly in the earlier stages of the game and Fastest Finger First.[33] Executive producer Colman Hutchinson claims that the production team is aware of the extent to which certain questions may be gendered.[34] For example, when contestant Geoff Aquatias is asked for £64,000 'What is given for a fifteenth wedding anniversary?', Tarrant responds with the quip: 'Your wife will be screaming the answer at the set right now – she'll know the answer, they *always* do!'.[35] Such comments function within the very predictable parameters of gendered knowledge, although even these acknowledgments do not occur *too* frequently as (relying on the ideologies of luck and/or natural ability) the infrastructure of the game itself must be seen to be as 'transparent' as possible. Although some have suggested that the wider trajectory of the game favours conceptions of masculine knowledge (with a predominance of questions on subjects such as military history or science),[36] a close analysis of the show does not necessarily bear this out.

The issue of gender and knowledge on the programme could be explored in more detail, but in terms of its 'egalitarian' ideology, it would seem that gender is not necessarily perceived as a key tension for it to resolve. As Tarrant's comments indicate, gender in *Millionaire* is clearly understood as a *difference*, but not necessarily an inequality. In the UK, Celador produced a burst of *Millionaire* programmes in 2001 entitled 'Women's Specials', but (as with Tarrant's open exclamation 'It's a woman!') it would clearly be impossible to consider a similarly explicit recognition of class, ethnicity or sexuality. As I discuss below, this is because, when placed within the programme's wider emphasis on the family and the heteronormative status of the couple, gender differences are hegemonically imagined as a binding force of commonality – something that 'we' all *share*.

As Whannel explains, in occupying the position of 'ordinary' person in the genre, contestants in a range of quiz and game shows have historically been obliged to perform 'social roles, and especially gender roles, they may not wish to inhabit'.[37] But what is important here is the ways in which *Millionaire*'s negotiation of these discourses relates to the specificity of its format – or rather the relationship between the format and the intervention of the UK host. What was initially striking about *Millionaire* was its expert generation of drama and tension, evoked

38 See Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto, 2000).

39 See ibid.

40 This may be in part shaped by the (class-based) British conception that talking so openly about money 'isn't done'. Relatively extensive invocation and coverage of contestant's circumstances was seen early on in the US context with the big quiz shows in the 1950s such as *Twenty-One* and *The $64,000 Question*. See Olaf Hoerschelmann, 'Beyond the tailfin: education and the politics of knowledge on big money quiz shows', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2000), pp. 177–94.

41 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, p. 181.

42 Ibid., p. 182.

43 Usually screened after 10 pm, *Tarrant on TV* takes a very distanced and often mocking look at bizarre television programmes or adverts from around the world — often permeated (in terms of the clips themselves) by an emphasis on the sexual and the risque.

through its reinvention of the searchlight aesthetic (pioneered by *Mastermind*) within a skillful orchestration of camera movement and music. The aesthetic creation of tension is of course integral to the genre, but within this framework *Millionaire* placed a particular emphasis on the drama of the contestant's personal narrative. In very broad terms, this can be linked to television's wider foregrounding of 'first person' and subjective modes of experience,[38] although that is not to deny that this still offers the 'ordinary' person a very limited role to perform themselves within what is necessarily television's 'third-person' context.[39] However, *Millionaire* places a particular emphasis on the personal and familial context of the contestant. With open discussion of a contestant's hourly wage or burden of debt, this was arguably invoked more explicitly than has generally been the case in the history of the British quiz show.[40] As part of this framework, the presence of the partner or family member in *Millionaire* is crucial to the geography of the drama, fostering a dialectic which sets up a whole series of gendered oppositions between activity/passivity, emotion/reason and, most crucially, production/consumption.

The most recurrent image of women on the UK programme positions them in the studio audience, and the subject position offered to the female partner or spouse is fundamentally *reactive* and, by extension, *passive*. They are not only denied movement but also (in the absence of a microphone) speech, so that any responses to the host's banter are offered through a smile, a nod, or a thumbs-up sign. This context places a particular emphasis on the melodramatic repertoire of physical expression, whether in terms of face or body language. This is not to deny that when the contestant is a woman, men (as partners, friends, fathers or brothers) can also occupy this position, which is effectively inscribed as reactive by the text itself. In this sense, the structural relationship between contestant and supporter is staged by the spatial organization of the format. Yet, while this may set the scene for, it does not dictate, the gendering of the UK show under examination here. Rather, this is shaped by the predominant image of male contestant and female supporter, and the ways in which the dynamics of this are negotiated by the host.

Formats are popular with the television industry precisely because they offer a potential sense of security (if they have been 'proven' elsewhere), with the possibility for local adaptation and inflection. It is evidently largely the combination of the contestants, providing what Bonner describes as 'the local ordinary',[41] and the host which fosters a sense of national specificity and variation. In this respect, hosts often bring with them an existing media persona, and it is worth noting here that those selected for the 'prestige role' of hosting *Millionaire* have been overwhelmingly men.[42] Depending on the age of the viewer, in terms of the UK Tarrant was already well known as a television presenter of shows such as the Saturday morning children's programme *Tiswas* (1974–81) and *Tarrant on TV* (1992–).[43] He was also already familiar from his role as a radio broadcaster for Capital FM.

Tarrant exudes the arrogant self-confidence associated with the latter, with a bold address which enables him to be mildly insulting to contestant and/or studio audience. But this bold, loud and brash approach also has class undertones, conveying a certain 'common touch' which fosters an illusion of connection with working-class life. This is despite the paradox that it was essentially *Millionaire* which catapulted him into a higher stratosphere of stardom and wealth – at least in terms of the money he can command per hour on television and his aura of prestige. But in this sense, Tarrant is also emblematic of the success myth (working from 'ordinary' beginnings to become a millionaire).[44] In discussions as to whether *Millionaire* might be encouraging a culture based on a windfall mentality, an emphasis on Tarrant's own workaholic ethos confirms the ideological thrust of the success myth ideology.[45] As Bonner notes, in general Tarrant has an 'edgier' style than presenters of other *Millionaire* formats – particularly when compared to the USA's Philbin, who emerged from the televisual context of a morning chat show presenter and maintains what Bonner describes as 'the soft, avuncular manner proper to that'.[46] Indeed, while the US version may have displayed an imbalance where gender was concerned, gender identities are not conferred with the same bold strokes evident in the British example.

In the UK version, the dichotomies of player/reactor and active/passive are crucial in mapping out the gendered discourses of production and consumption in the programme. Offering a dichotomized relationship between 'Mr Breadwinner and Mrs Consumer', the acts and meanings of consumption in western societies have been 'obsessively gendered' as female.[47] Evidently, the social and ideological dimensions which gave rise to this dichotomy have subsequently been subject to significant challenge, and the gendered meanings of production and consumption are clearly not fixed. (Indeed, *Millionaire* indicates how these meanings are constituted discursively, and must be continually subject to renegotiation). With a shift toward conceptualizing identity in terms of consumption rather than production, there has been the suggestion that the acceleration of a consumer/display culture has 'rendered men "feminized" consumers rather than "manly" producers',[48] (although the growth of interest in male consumption has posited a more complex perspective on this).[49] While Tim Edwards suggests that the realities of male and female consumption are often obscured by the prevalence of 'strongly gendered images and stereotypes',[50] it is precisely these gendered stereotypes which are crucial to the construction of production and consumption on *Millionaire*, an arena in which a firmly polarized construction of 'Mr Breadwinner and Mrs Consumer' is apparently far from obsolete.

While quiz shows have long since constructed their contestants as inhabiting work identities (identified by factors such as profession and region), the argument that production or 'work' has a role to play *in* the

44 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, p. 183.

45 Barber, 'The successful format', p. 33.

46 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, p. 182.

47 Victoria de Grazia (ed.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspectives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 3.

48 John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p. 94.
49 See Colin Campbell, 'Shopping, pleasure, shopping and the sex war', in Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (eds), *The Shopping Experience* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 166–76.
50 Tim Edwards, *Contradictions of Consumption: Concepts, Practices and Politics in Consumer Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 132.

51 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*,
p. 137.

52 Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures'.

quiz show conflicts with existing work on the genre. In her wider analysis of the discourses of *Ordinary Television*, Bonner emphasizes how 'work and employment have never been particularly productive discourses for television, because however ambiguously television may situate itself as a leisure pursuit, it certainly establishes itself in opposition to work'.[51] Bonner sees the quiz show as part of this 'quarantining' of the discourse of work on television, and to a certain extent, this argument holds true. While offering a spectacle for entertainment, the quiz show might be conceived as a space of 'carnival pleasures'[52] in which the normal rules of money under capitalism do not apply. Although giving up work is not the outcome for most contestants, on *Millionaire* this fantasy continually permeates the chats between host and contestant. One of Tarrant's most famous quips at the end of a game is that the winnings 'aren't bad for a night's work'. This articulates the quiz show in opposition to work in order to suggest that, for most of us, to earn thousands of pounds in a few minutes is an impossibility. But in the quiz show, production or work identities are still crucial in soliciting the viewer to make judgments about the contestant's background, status and likely performance. While in many quiz shows this has been limited historically to an indication of profession ('a civil servant from Southampton'), in *Millionaire* the drawing on elements of personal narrative means that 'work' is invoked as more integral to the drama of the situation. Yoghurt factory workers, postmen, car mechanics and teachers are repeatedly asked by Tarrant how 'many years' work' their current winnings represent. This also provides the context for him to express an emotional involvement with their narrative – the display of ecstasy or regret, as depending on the outcome of the game. (At the same time of course, his awe and enthusiasm simultaneously effaces what he is being paid for the value of his own 'labour' as he commands the show from his chair.) While again intended to set up an opposition between the quiz show and the 'real world' when it comes to the exchange of capital and labour, the apparently accelerated desire to involve us with the drama of the contestant's narrative means that the mundane and oppressive nature of capitalist relations in the 'real' world – of work – must also be constantly invoked.

The step needed to situate this as 'breadwinning', however, largely comes into focus around gender or, more specifically, the ways in which this work is linked back to a familial context. First, the exploitation of the dramatic value of labour emerges most clearly around manual workers who are invariably male. But, in cutting across the class range of male contestants on the show, the notion of breadwinning is evoked most clearly in relation to the family context rather than the specificity of the occupation. For example, in an exchange somewhat typical of the show, physics teacher (and, by the end of the episode, millionaire winner) David Edwards is asked: 'So you've got a wife up there in the audience and two kids, what would be a serious amount of money for you to take home?'.[53] Positioning the male contestant as the provider for an

53 *Millionaire*, tx 14 January 2001.

54 *Millionaire*, tx 19 March 2003.

55 *Millionaire*, tx 24 April, 2002.

56 See Irene Padavic and Barbara
Reskin, *Women and Men at Work*
(London: Pine Forge Press, 1994).
57 Wayne, '*Who Wants to be a
Millionaire?*', p. 215.

58 Ibid., p. 215.

59 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*,
p. 110.

60 Jane Root, *Open the Box: About
Television* (London: Comedia,
1986), p. 97.

economically dependent family, these gendered relations are sometimes most apparent when the female partner/wife is *not* in the studio, providing as it does the context for a public/private dichotomy to dovetail with the production/consumption equation. After being introduced to Ivan Dodds, an electricity meter reader from Belfast, we are told that 'Ivan's wife and kids are back home and they waved him off this morning with the plea "bring back lots of money Daddy!"'.[54] With contestant Phil Leiwy, a salesman from Kent, Tarrant explains how 'Phil's wife Mary is back at home looking after the kids, Jack and Hetty, [and they are] all terrified that Daddy's going to embarrass them. As long as he brings them home the money, they won't really mind.'[55] It is worth noting here that when female contestants do appear on the programme, the male partner is very rarely suggested as the absent other in the domestic sphere, looking after the children. It is true that female contestants can be invoked as the bountiful breadwinner carrying the hopes and desires (and hence economic demands) of the family on their shoulders; however, this is not often apparent, and when it is, it occurs with families in low-income brackets – where women's paid work and its relationship with family life has always had a different status.[56]

These discussions form part of the programme's general tendency to place 'a fantastic emphasis on the family'.[57] According to Mike Wayne, this relates to the capitalist ethos of the quiz show in terms of consumption, while simultaneously deflecting associations of individual greed and acquisitiveness which could otherwise be attributed to a show offering large sums of money.[58] This is evidently part of a wider historical, institutional and cultural context in which television, and the quiz or game show in particular, has offered very conservative and traditional conceptions of the family where 'the trajectory of the ordinary life [is] ... one in which romance, marriage children and grandchildren follow inevitably'.[59] Historically, quiz shows have often required participants to tell amusing stories which sketch this backdrop, ranging from narratives about how the contestant met their spouse, eventful honeymoons, or disastrous holidays with the family. The invocation of gender is integral here, and these discourses are crucial to how quiz show participants are employed to 'be ordinary', to stand in for 'us' 'as viewers momentarily whisked to the other side of the screen'.[60] Yet while such scenarios still exist (in shows ranging from *Family Fortunes, Play Your Cards Right* [ITV, 1979] to *Catchphrase* [ITV, 1988–]), it is also worth noting shifts in the genre. In this respect, forming as they do part of the quiz show's bid to celebrate a shared culture of joviality, entertainment and communality, these discourses are far less prevalent in the newer strain of meaner, psychological shows which (in the UK) extend to shows such as *The Weakest Link, No Win No Fee, The Chair*, the short-lived *Shafted* (ITV1, 2001) and *The Enemy Within*. While, particularly early on in the *Millionaire*'s history, Tarrant was known for toying with the contestant by effectively seeking to mislead them in the decision-making process (hence the ubiquity of catch-phrase 'is that your final

answer?'), the show does not really belong to the category above. Although displaying considerable differences in format and structure, these shows share common ground in so far as winning is no longer solely dependent on knowledge (or 'luck'), but rather on gaining psychological and physical control over a situation or competing psychologically with other contestants.

Particularly in the UK context, where the quiz show has historically played down the more open competitive individualism and acquisitiveness of the US shows,[61] this harsher and occasionally sadistic approach constituted quite a shift. In combining knowledge with the manipulation of others, the most obvious pioneer of this is *The Weakest Link*. In terms of gender, particularly given women's wider marginalization in the presentation of the genre, the 'threat' of the domineering female host, Anne Robinson, was registered by the initial bid to suggest that her power could be conceived in sexual terms – which is more reassuring in terms of traditional constructions of femininity. (The programme was greeted with such comments as 'the concept of a superbitch is a turn-on to certain males. They like a dominant female ticking them off',[62] or 'she presents the aura of a school ma'am but with the appeal of a dominatrix'.)[63] When it came to the programme's wider ethos, the culture of mistrust and uncertainty quickly extended to other shows – notably with the insertion of male hosts – such as *The Enemy Within* (where one of the contestants has already been given the answers), and *No Win, No Fee* (where contestants select fellow competitors to answer questions that they feel they are least likely to get right). In focusing as much on the interaction *between* contestants as on the dialogue between host and participants, these programmes make no effort to disguise what Bonner describes as the 'unsocial aspects of competition'.[64] As in many reality TV formats, they display a decidedly Machiavellian combination of co-operation and competition, and in this respect are highly capitalist in structure, though in a different way to *Millionaire*. While (like *Fifteen-to-one*), *The Weakest Link* draws on the structural referent of a 'Victorian classroom',[65] it also mirrors a transient grouping akin to the workplace in which, as Jeremy Gilbert describes in a different context, strict limits are set on cooperation 'expected of economic actors who may temporarily act in concert in order to improve the market rate for their labour but who must be understood as ultimately in competition with each other'.[66] Again similar to many reality shows, participants are deliberately *abstracted* from their wider social, cultural and familial contexts in order to place the focus on the internal politics of the competition.

What is *apparently* important here is not the participants' place within a wider social structure (their social background or economic context), but how they can negotiate the internal dynamic of the game: who can they trust; can they form an alliance; how will the strategic plan of other contestants determine their fate?[67] In *The Weakest Link*, host Robinson is likely to invoke a contestant's profession, or even

61 Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky', p. 197.

62 Jane Robins, 'Quiz shows: naff old men in sparkly jackets?', *The Independent*, 3 November 2000, p. 23.
63 John Corn, 'The Weakest Link', *The Washington Post*, 21 April 2001, p. 12.

64 Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, p. 170.

65 Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky', p. 182.
66 Jeremy Gilbert, 'A class performance: why the class struggle was a really good idea', paper delivered at CongressCATH conference, Leeds University, 2002. URL: www.leeds.ac.uk/ cath/congress/2002/ programme/abs/59.shtml [accessed 15 April 2003].
67 I say 'apparently' here as this newer brand of shows raises questions as to the ideology of opportunity. In rendering issues of inequality and difference more invisible, they could be denying that they exist, returning us to an 'egalitarian' discourse of an equal chance 'for all'.

education, to reinforce criticism for an incorrect answer ('you say you're an IT consultant but you don't know the answer to...' 'Are you sure you've got an degree in...'), but familial context or economic situation are rendered more invisible. There is no partner in the studio audience – which largely remains in darkness and plays no role in the format – and the money is in any case less of a focus on the show. As on *Millionaire*, gender stereotypes can be evident in terms of knowledge (men, for example, complaining that they would not know about 'twin-sets' because clothes are related to 'women's' competences). But there is evidently little space for this to extend to the conferring of imagined gender identities in terms of production and consumption (even if we could conceive of a female host articulating this). The winning contestant *is* asked what they would spend the prize fund on, but there is not the staging of personal circumstances, and with it the familial and gender relations, that is integral to the geography of *Millionaire*. Both shows invoke discourses of work: in *The Weakest Link* obliquely through a microcosm of workplace politics, and in *Millionaire* in terms of 'personal' narrative and the promise of social mobility. What is different here is that with the 'real world' referent as integral to its drama, *Millionaire* then relates its 'labour' back to a very traditional patriarchal family structure.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that the notion of the self-effacing male provider is the only way in which production and consumption is articulated in *Millionaire*. Prior to appearing in Fastest Finger First, all contestants are asked to fantasize about what they would buy or do if they won the top prize, out of which context individual desires and wishes emerge. For example, with one million pounds IT consultant Graham Hooper claims he would buy 'Basingstoke football club and a brewery', garage-owner Michael Donnelly would be the proud owner of a golf course, chef Kenny Allen would own a race horse, and retired banker Geoff Aquatias would fly a spitfire plane. Female contestants can also express wishful, personal desires outside the demands of the family – contestant June Woods would 'like to bathe in chocolate' (a dream also expressed by contestant Fiona Wheeler), after which she would like to travel round Australia with Scottish comedian Billy Connolly. The 'crazy' and sometimes eccentric nature of these desires means that they can be seen to stand at one remove from the usual system of commodity exchange. Yet these fantasy wishes are articulated far more by men – not least, of course, because of their prevalence as contestants. But the concept of the male consumer is less apparent on the programme precisely because this is defined as the female role *par excellence*. While women may be invoked as part of an economically dependent 'good' family, they are also imagined as the selfish, single-minded and indeed *voracious* consumer. This is still constructed within the context of economic dependency (the male partner is winning the money in the chair), but it is imagined as far from 'passive'.

68 Whannel, 'The price is right but the moments are sticky', p. 193.
69 Lewis, 'TV games: people as performers', p. 45.

In the quiz show, female contestants (and hostesses) have long since been expected to 'respond to the cheerfully flirtatious approach' of the male host,[68] and while male contestants are treated with affable deference, 'the appellations [of] "my love" or "dear"'[69] greet the presence of women. These gendered appellations are still very much in evidence in *Millionaire* (women of all ages tend to be called 'my darling' by Tarrant and are more likely to be hugged by the host), but the more overtly sexist entendres have here been replaced by an equally narrow repertoire of gender stereotypes. First, there are the constructions of women as generally hungry for their husband/partner's hard-earned money. In his first appearance on the show, surgeon Richard Bliss explained how his wife and children were at home, but upon his return on the second night, Tarrant remarks:

> CT: So now there's a few quid in the offing the wife has come out of the woodwork.
> RB: I tried to put her off, but once the smell [of money] is there, then there's no stopping her.[70]

70 *Millionaire*, tx 12 April 2002.

More often, however, the materialistic female spouse is constructed within the context of consumption. When introduced to John Evans, a baggage handler from Edinburgh, we are told that 'since seeing the advert for [*Who Wants to be a Millionaire*] . . . he looked at the screen and shouted "I do". And since that time, Linda, his wife, up there in the audience, knew he was going to be on the show, she's been going round all the shops shouting "charge it!", "charge it!".'[71] In fact, references to women decimating their male partners' credit cards are extremely frequent (more strikingly, even when women are in the chair themselves). The image of the woman as the devourer of male-created value, actually spending the money *before* it can be accumulated, is a very pervasive trope on the programme, and Tarrant's comment 'Don't turn around and look at . . . she's spent it already', is articulated with striking frequency. When contestant Tariq Pasha (one of the few Asian contestants on the UK version of the programme) is at £300, Tarrant insists that fiancee Petra in the audience has indeed 'spent' the money already, explaining 'They do that, girls – she's thinking shoes, holiday, shopping, in that order'.[72] Simultaneously both consumer and commodity, women are imagined as immersed in a culture of endless needs, not afforded the distance nor voice which facilitates the comments of their male counterparts. Men's preferences and desires are not subject to the same homogenous and diminutive expression.

71 *Millionaire Classic*, tx 1 August 2003.

72 *Millionaire*, tx 9 February 2003.

Consumption in all its forms, from popular culture to shopping, has clearly played a crucial role in feminist criticism. It has been seen as variously victimizing, subordinating or liberating and resistant (or as contradictory combinations of both), depending on which critical approach is under scrutiny. The notion of leisure – as opposed to domestic – shopping 'as empowerment' characterized the surge of intellectual engagement with consumption in the 1980s.[73] The emphasis

73 Janice Winship, 'New disciplines for women and the rise of the chain store in the 1930s', in Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (eds), *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth Century Consumer Culture* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 24.

on consumption as activity has been particularly marked in historical work surrounding the emergence of mass consumer culture, female consumption and the department store in the nineteenth century. The discursive construction of the consuming woman on *Millionaire* still demonstrates a heavy debt to this period – a time when new relations between production and consumption, and earning and spending, were being forged. Historical research has emphasized the extent to which, in demanding a venture into public space, shopping offered women the possibilities of freedom and independence, in many ways challenging the ideology of separate spheres and positioning the female shopper as 'an especially disruptive figure' in the emerging consumer landscape.[74] This 'disruptive' force was particularly clear in the discursive construction of consumerism as 'unleashing female desires' which could conflict with the economic and cultural maintenance of the patriarchal family (financially ruining husbands by running-up debts, for example). [75] Narratives surrounding the insatiable female consumer were highly sexualized, and concerns over the erosion of men's economic power merged with anxieties over the disruptive connotations of female sexuality.[76] While the image of the woman as 'seduced' by the spaces and products of consumerism indicates an absence of agency, the image of arousal and 'unbridled sexuality' clearly also implies transgression.[77] Mica Nava argues that, transcending the historical parameters of this earlier period, the possibilities of consumerism may have had politically progressive implications for women:

> Consumption has offered women new areas of authority and expertise; new sources of income, a new sense of consumer rights and one of the consequences of these developments has been a heightened entitlement outside the sphere of consumerism which may well have contributed to the emergence of feminism.[78]

This may partly explain why women's relations with consumption often represent an area of tension within popular culture.[79] As *Millionaire* makes clear, it is at this representational level that consumerism functions as a prime sphere in which constructions of femininity are performed, defined, negotiated and contested.[80]

While we are dealing with quite different historical periods here, the discussion above indicates how the image of the voracious female consumer speaks to tensions surrounding the negotiation of gender identities. As Nava argues, one way of reading these discourses is to consider them as expressing men's feelings of 'passivity as they witness[ed] the reorientation of women's desires away from the home'.[81] In many ways, *Millionaire* offers a retrenchment of highly traditional discursive constructions of masculinity and femininity. These play down discourses surrounding 'feminization' by marginalizing and effacing both female production and male consumption. Certainly, the image of the insatiable female consumer as 'born to shop' evidently has a contemporary currency in sites ranging from the hit television series *Sex*

74 Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 6.

75 Ibid., p. 46.

76 Mica Nava, 'Modernity's disavowal: women, the city and the department store', in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (eds), *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 96.

77 Ibid., p. 76.

78 Mica Nava, 'Consumerism and its contradictions', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 1 no. 2 (1987), pp. 204–210.

79 Maggie Andrews, 'Butterflies and caustic asides: housewives. comedy and the feminist movement', in Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 57.

80 Andrews and Talbot, *All The World and Her Husband*, p. 1.

81 Nava, 'Modernity's disavowal', p. 97.

82 Colin Campbell, 'Shopping, pleasure and the sex war', p. 167.

and the City (1998–2004) to women's magazines (and as in women's magazines, the representations of female consumption in *Millionaire* work to fuel the economic logic of the advertisements in the commercial breaks). Yet when compared to *Millionaire*, a crucial difference in these images of the voracious female consumer is that the woman is certainly imagined as economically independent. In *Millionaire*, sketched in brief moments of caricature, these discursive constructions offer little sense of the more complex, powerful (although not unproblematic) images of female consumption available elsewhere.

Despite the suggestion that gender boundaries have become increasingly blurred where shopping and consumption are concerned, existing empirical research has also argued more strongly for the persistence of differential shopping styles and habits: men are apparently more inclined to enact shopping within a work framework, conceiving of it as a 'purchase-driven exercise' related to the satisfaction of a particular need; while women are more likely to view it through a 'leisure' framework, as a pleasure-seeking activity in its own right[82] (constructions which notably again relate back to perceptions surrounding the gendered expression of sexual desire). Such contrasts may in part be explained by the continued perception that shopping is a woman's activity. Either way, the construction of men as general shoppers does not really enter the vocabulary of *Millionaire*. Its apparently 'feminized' associations conflict with the affirmation of the breadwinner ideology, and the emphasis on a commercial, narcissistic masculinity is not evident here. In fact, once Tarrant has imagined the female partner as 'off shopping', the male contestant will often explain how he had not even thought what *he* may like to spend any winnings on. The invocation of shopping also often works to emphasize the 'incompatible' nature of male and female desires. For example, when contestant Andrew Whitely explains how with one million pounds he would like to 'explore Antarctica' (another personal desire seemingly outside of the everyday realm of capitalist exchange), he explains how he would leave girlfriend Wendy behind:

CT: It's not a girl's idea of a good holiday, is it?
AW: No – I think she'd like somewhere she could do a bit more shopping!

Other gendered oppositions are drawn between shopping and golfing holidays, trips to the Football World Cup and sailing excursions. Yet it seems equally significant here that, when appearing as contestants, women are not nearly as likely as Tarrant or their male partners to emphasize a general, abstracted sense of shopping when expressing what *they* would do with the money themselves. One of few occasions when this did mirror the more conventional construction of female consumption is when Jane Bentley, a sales ledger clerk from Manchester, explains how with a big win she would 'throw away' all her clothes and 'buy a whole new wardrobe'.[83] This example also acts as a potential

83 *Millionaire Classic*, tx 8 August 2003.

reminder of the fact that access to the fruits of plentiful leisure shopping (the contestant's wardrobe had not been renewed for some time) is necessarily unequal. As I discuss in more detail below, this is indicative of the ways in which these generalized gender relations function to play down the apparently more difficult inequalities of class. The persistent emphasis on shopping as a constant pastime and source of pleasure for women equally renders invisible the notion of shopping as 'work', in terms of domestic consumption, for example, as well as the ways in which for many families the winnings will indeed contribute to the more mundane necessities of everyday life. The construction of shopping as effectively an everyday role of the 'housewife' is clearly not a productive image for the aspirational ethos of the programme. Thus, in terms of the argument that the capitalist ethos of the genre demands that work and labour be effaced, in *Millionaire* this 'effacement' is a highly selective and, above all, gendered affair.

84 John Fiske, 'Everyday quizzes, everyday life', in *Reading the Popular* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 133–48; Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures'; Fiske, 'Women and quiz shows.

Fiske's work[84] on the quiz show emphasizes its promotion of capitalist ideologies as well as the textual spaces it provides for resistant readings by the audience. His most concerted focus on gender in 'Women and quiz shows: consumerism, patriarchy and resisting pleasures' examines shows which pivot on 'women's' knowledge, including 'shopping' programmes such as *The New Price is Right* organized around the comparative value of commodities. While clearly promoting and fetishizing commodities (and contestants are rewarded for their 'good' knowledge of the existing capitalist system), Fiske suggests that the programme offers contradictory gender ideologies. It provides, for example, public and noisy acclaim to female skills that are normally rendered invisible or silenced, and it frees the 'housewife competitor' from the demands of

85 Fiske, 'Quizzical pleasures', p. 279.

family shopping.[85] Most significant here is Fiske's emphasis on the dynamics of patriarchal control where the ownership and exchange of money is concerned. Focusing on women from lower socioeconomic groups which he perceives form the core of the show's audience, he emphasizes how:

> For women fulfilling the traditional feminine role of unwaged domestic labour, the money is the husband's. . . . In *The New Price is Right* . . . masculine money [is replaced by] feminine knowledge. The show symbolically liberates women from their economic constraints and in so doing, liberates them from their husband's economic power.[86]

86 Fiske, 'Women and quiz shows', p. 137.

Fiske could be accused of presenting a somewhat outdated, or at least simplistic and abstracted, account of gender relations (even at the time he was writing). Yet *Millionaire* would do little to confirm this. In fact, however playfully and humorously the constructions of gender are ascribed, *Millionaire* offers what is almost a textual opposition to the spaces of resistance conceived by Fiske. What is suggested repeatedly here is the male ownership of male-created value, and questions concerning the 'active' nature of cultural consumption are not invited in

these scenarios. It is clear that the gender relations are simply *conferred*: we do not witness the act of consumption, the symbolic value of the goods, nor the reality of how the money is actually spent. What we are presented with here is the expectant, and in some ways 'imaginary', nature of consumption on *Millionaire*. As with the constant focus on the cheque, the continual references to commodities and consumption are needed to make 'real' the otherwise abstract and intangible accumulation of value.

However, as Fiske's argument above suggests, the ownership and *management* of money are not same thing. Although less common than the appearance of the voracious female consumer, *Millionaire* also offers representations of a domineering wife and henpecked male spouse – as configured around the organization of financial control. It is important to emphasize here that, although clearly different generic contexts, one of the closest discursive companions to Tarrant's construction of gender is perhaps the television sitcom, as well as standup comedy which harks back to a music-hall or variety strain. Like the sitcom, the rhetoric of gender in *Millionaire* conjures up a recognizable and implicitly 'shared' world peopled with references to overbearing mothers ('Has your mother given you a briefing? They usually do'), domineering mother-in-laws ('You chose your mother-in-law as a phone-a-friend – was that wise?'), lazy teenage children and bossy wives. Like *Millionaire*, the sitcom is often reliant on a perception of 'innate' gender differences,[87] and Laraine Porter's suggestion that British sitcom has historically offered a 'playful poke at the traditions of heterosexual monogamy: marriage, restrictive gender roles, the mismatch between male and female . . . desire',[88] could well describe the comedic interludes on *Millionaire*. (As with the history of the sitcom, the joker here is of course also male.) It is from this context that we are offered the image of the henpecked male spouse who may be 'breadwinning' the money, but who does not have authority over its ultimate management (because of ''er indoors'). This is not in terms of the dangers of uncontrollable female consumption, but with respect to the maintenance of the family finances. This emerges particularly around the lure of gambling on the show – when men are tempted to try their luck in the game – but are apparently restrained through the thought of reprisal from their female partner. For example, when contestant Peter Thomas's wife Lynne is absent on the night of his first appearance on the show, he contemplates gambling on a question while musing:

> PT: My wife will go mad [if I lose] – maybe she won't find out?
> CT: I think she might – people watch this show you know.
> PT: She'd find out anyway, she always does.
> CT: Are you a betting man then?
> PT: No – she just always knows where the purse strings are . . .[89]

References to the wrath of 'the wife' are not infrequent, and invoke the comedy stereotype of the female spouse as a 'signifier of restraint' or killjoy.[90] The image of women as money manager, however, is hardly

87 Andrews, 'Butterflies and caustic asides', p. 55.

88 Laraine Porter, 'Tarts, tampons and tyrants: women and representation in British comedy', in Wagg (ed.), *Because I Tell a Joke or Two*, p. 83.

89 *Millionaire*, tx 23 April 2002.

90 Andrews, 'Butterflies and caustic asides', p. 57.

radical. The role is traditionally seen as feminine in its links with the day-to-day running of the domestic sphere and knowledge of the family needs. Furthermore, it is also easily positioned as the close companion to consumption. But as Porter's analysis of the sitcom explores, these comedic constructions of women, from the 'nagging wife', restraining spouse or the tyrannical mother-in-law, all variously signify anxieties over the maintenance of masculine power. As she explains, 'mocking the woman is also a way of disavowing her threat to masculinity, to freedom, to control, to order – all that masculinity holds dear and needs to maintain in order to shore up itself against all the odds'.[91]

91 Porter, 'Tarts, tampons and tyrants', p. 93.

While the emphasis on the 'shoring' up of masculinity seems key here, in terms of the ideology of opportunity, I have suggested that gender is not understood as the central issue for the show to 'resolve'. The emphasis on class seems particularly important given that the programme's explicit generation of drama demands raising the spectacle of subordination for all to see (we may be left with the image of the alienated yoghurt factory worker rather than his win of £16,000, and whether this is necessarily recuperated by the egalitarian promise of the programme is debatable). As a result, in the UK version gender is used to play a particular role within this framework. Similar to advertising, the focus on gender as primary to identity springs from its 'signifying power' – it can be communicated in an instant and (it is heteronormatively assumed that) it addresses us all.[92] This is a crucial effect of the rhetoric of gender in *Millionaire* which essentially offers a framework of subject positions into which couples are slotted, a universal conception of gender relations in the evocation of a 'shared' community of viewers and consumers. This emphasis on a relentless stream of providing fathers, consuming wives, henpecked husbands and 'girls' who shop, works to play down what the programme may conceive as the potentially more divisive boundaries of class (and in terms of the relations between viewer and screen, possibly ethnicity). Even though there is nothing intrinsic to the game itself that dictates the gendered discourses analyzed here, in *Millionaire*, the concept of 'woman' bears the brunt of this homogenizing thrust. It is through this that the programme clearly trades on the historical discourses of gender inequality, particularly surrounding the construction of labour and economic power, while these simultaneously seem to be a source of contemporary trouble and concern.

92 Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 136.

At the same time, it may be that the highly repetitious manner in which gender is ascribed here emphasizes its status as an act of construction. In this sense, the case of Diana Ingram may truly offer an example of the conscious *performance* of gender[93] which, in foregrounding the highly conventionalized construction of gender ideologies on *Millionaire*, imbued the entire drama with a transgressive dynamic which far exceeded its illegal implications. At the very least, what is clear is that the programme representing the most successful quiz show format of all time offers images which apparently refuse to uncouple masculinity and

93 Alison Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).

production, and femininity and consumption. While the question as to why the gender imbalance on the show arises (in certain territories) in the first place is crucial, it is also in part an empirical one. What *can* be suggested in terms of the UK is that the conventionalization and repetition of these gender identities may work to legitimize the masculinization of the format (and foster women's perception that as a televisual/cultural/public space, 'it's not for me'). While gender is invoked on *Millionaire* to suggest an 'ordinariness', a shared sense of experience, identification and community between viewer and text, this has had the effect of alienating women from its spectacular space. Although it may be the case that one of 'the most ordinary of televisual places ... is as a contestant on a gameshow',[94] the pronouncement 'It's a woman!' suggests precisely the opposite, confirming how this 'ordinariness' is at present a highly gendered affair.

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Figural vision: Freud, Lyotard and early cinematic comedy

LISA TRAHAIR

In his essay 'Cinema and psychoanalysis: parallel histories', Stephen Heath remarks upon the ability of cinema to figure the unconscious processes formulated in Freudian psychoanalysis, suggesting that this very much depends on how one conceives of the cinema and particularly the role of visuality in the cinema. When Freud was approached by his colleagues Sacks and Abraham to become involved in a film about psychoanalysis entitled *Secrets of the Soul*, at the time being envisaged by G.W. Pabst and UFA, he refused to entertain the notion that cinema could figure the unconscious or any of the concepts that pertained to it.[1] J.B. Pontalis, slightly less than forty years later, expressed similar reservations in his introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre's scenario for John Huston's 1962 film *Freud*: 'the unconscious does not present itself to be seen, fall into sight; the image does not receive, entertain, quite simply get the unconscious'.[2]

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Freud attaches great significance to the role of visuality in the dream. The regression to the visual, also known as 'considerations of representability', is one of the four operations of the dream-work, and hence of the primary process. For Freud, the difficulty encountered in a cinematic appropriation of this operation emerges from the fact that, as Heath puts it, 'in cinema "considerations of representability" are everything: the non-figurative collapses into the figurative, the symbolic becomes a matter of symbols, cinema *holds to* the visual'.[3] Heath explains that: 'Freud's psychoanalysis ... interrupts the vision of images, challenges the sufficiency of the representations they make, where cinema aims to sustain vision, to entertain – to bind in – the spectator with images'.[4]

1 Heath, 'Cinema and psychoanalysis: parallel histories', in Janet Bergstrom (ed.), *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 29.
2 Heath, translating and embellishing Pontalis's statement, ibid., p. 30.
3 Heath, summarizing Freud's position, ibid., p. 30.
4 Ibid., p. 31.

Heath, however, argues that such reservations might apply only to specific kinds of cinema. He contrasts, for example, the views of Franz Kafka and Virginia Woolf. Kafka's conception of the limitation of cinema is consonant with Freud's; he dislikes the medium's containment of vision, and pulls 'away from cinema as a surface continuity of images, urg[ing] an excess in seeing, a more visual vision'.[5] And Woolf sees in cinema the possibility of exactly what Kafka urges, something 'radically obscene'.[6] Heath's demand for an examination of cinematic specificity here is a legitimate response to Freud's reservations about cinema's ability to figure unconscious concepts and processes.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Indeed, while the cinematic apparatus has often been called the dream-machine, it could be argued that what is really at stake in the Freudian conception of the dream has not been fully brought to bear on our understanding of the processes of cinema. Lyotard's reading of Freud is, in this regard, profound. His development of an understanding of figurality as bound up with the specificity of the operation of the primary process as a force or energetics quite distinct from the figurative, and his examination of the impact such figurality has on signification and meaning, stand in stark contrast to the way film theory has used psychoanalysis to give meaning to films in terms of such Freudian scenarios as the Oedipus complex, the fort/da game, and the concept of wish-fulfilment. Even the theorization of cinema as a projection of an imaginary plenitude, which affords the viewer the opportunity to regress to a state of narcissistic identification with the screen, neglects the pertinence that the psychoanalytic conception of the operation of the primary process has for the visual and figural operations of the cinema.

The first part of this paper establishes a theoretical framework constructed *vis-à-vis* Lyotard's poststructuralist reconfiguration of some aspects of psychoanalysis by focusing on the relationship between discourse and figure in Freud's schematization of the operation of the primary process and the dream-work's figural function as both destructive and transformative of discursive meaning. The second part reorients this framework by considering the impact of Lyotard's formulation of an aesthetics of transformation upon Freud's work on the joke. This framework is then used to theorize the refined slapstick that emerged in the 1920s by way of an analysis of Charlie Chaplin's film *City Lights* (1931). Through it, I endeavour to demonstrate that cinema does indeed have access to the figural vision which Freud supposes is specific to the unconscious and that it is evident in the sight gags that made the slapstick distinctive at the end of the silent era.

Discourse, figure

7 See, in particular, David Carroll, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida (London: Routledge, 1987); Geoffrey Bennington, Lyotard: Writing the Event (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Bill Readings, Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics (London: Routledge, 1991).

Lyotard's book *Discours, Figure* has been understood as a poststructuralist intervention into the debates around signification and subjectivity that were prevalent in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s and somewhat later in anglophone countries.[7] The book, like so

many of the theoretical projects with which it was contemporaneous, attempts to move beyond both structuralism and Saussurean semiotics and the kind of textual analysis that the two together engendered, but what still makes it worthy of attention is the way its poststructuralist position is produced by opening up the discourses of linguistics and psychoanalysis to aesthetic considerations.

Central to Lyotard's project are the eponymous 'concepts' of discourse and figure, although precisely what they entail is not easily encapsulated. Throughout the book they are mobile terms which designate different things in different places. Considered as oppositional, commentators have noted the alignment of discourse with the word, reading, intelligibility, surface, the law, systematicity and the code, and the figure with the image, seeing, depth, desire, transgression, difference and instability.[8] Yet, both the meaning of the terms and the success of any such efforts to oppose them are complicated by the imbricated relation between them. Mary Lydon qualifies this relation by noting that:

> discourse and figure are given together. Not sequentially, not in juxtaposition, but together, at once, one on top of the other like two superimposed photographic images, or like the representations of the unconscious. This is a spatial relationship that language, in its linearity, does not permit, hence the imperative to write 'Discourse, figure', where the comma ... represents graphically, but mutely, as a pause, a blank, a hesitation, one might say, that which cannot be verbalised.[9]

Discourse and figure considered in this manner are not orders of meaning that preside over separate or exclusive domains, rather the realm of each inhabits the other. Lyotard suggests, rather enigmatically, that 'the figure dwells in discourse like a phantasm while discourse dwells in the figure like a dream'.[10] In some instances of 'textual production', discourse will dominate; in others, the figure takes hold of the text. While discourse and figure at times have distinct methods of operation and are geared towards particular ends, the precise form of a given 'text' is based on the specificity of the relation between discourse and figure in that text. Lyotard's book stages the various imbrications of discourse and figure in the separate fields of linguistics, phenomenology, aesthetics and psychoanalysis. Discourse and figure together are responsible for linguistic, pictorial, plastic, poetic, rhythmic and oneiric form; the text's transparent, intelligible, meaningful, rhetorical, deconstructive, destructive and, I would add, comic posturing.

As well as demonstrating such imbrications, Lyotard charts a sliding scale from discourse to figurality, from the transparent signification of the written word, which is exemplary of discourse, through to the space of language, the phenomenology of the senses and of the body in space, the pictorial dimensions of the visual image, the figurality of the poetic, until ultimately one arrives at the non-sensory destructive figurality of the unconscious. Is this trajectory a movement from the

11 For more on the way comedy impacts on the relation between restricted and general economy see Lisa Trahair, 'The comedy of philosophy: Hegel, Derrida and Bataille', *Angelaki*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2001), pp. 155–69.

12 Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'The connivances of desire with the figural', in *Driftworks*, ed. Roger McKeon (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1984).

13 Lyotard, 'The dream-work does not think', p. 19.

14 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: WW Norton, 1977).

restricted economy of discourse to the general economy of figurality, where restricted economy is an economy of the production of meaning, of investment and return, where surplus and/or excess are incessantly reinvested, while general economy is an economy of absolute expenditure, of waste, entailing the destruction of meaning without reserve?[11] Certainly, once the figure liaises with the unconscious and 'connives' with desire, it takes hold of the operations of discourse and transforms them to the point where sense becomes nonsense. In *Discours, Figure*, Lyotard might thus be understood to be pursuing a Nietzschean/Bataillian reading of psychoanalysis wherein the unconscious is the source and arena of the destructive Dionysian tendencies of general economy, while the conscious/preconscious system effectuates the formative strategies of an Apollonian restricted economy.[12]

The figurality of the dream

We can see how the imbrication of discourse and figure inscribes a relation between restricted and general economy, and how the figural operates in accordance with Dionysian destruction, in Lyotard's revision of the Freudian dream-work. Lyotard grafts the concepts of discourse and figurality onto the components of the dream in order to account for the dream's sense and nonsense. This elaboration of the relation between sense and nonsense is pertinent not just as a starting point for understanding the dream but for all that psychoanalysis concerns itself with – hysterical and neurotic symptoms, instances of parapraxis and jokes as well. Indeed, Lyotard wants to show that the figural operations of the unconscious exist independently of the privileged subject matter of psychoanalysis, exist, that is, as the tools of aesthetic production. 'Considerations of beauty aside', he writes at the beginning of the chapter on the dream-work, 'art begins here'.[13]

The general orientation of Lyotard's reading of chapter six of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is directed towards his dispute with Jacques Lacan over whether or not the unconscious is structured like a language. Lyotard is motivated simultaneously by his conviction that the unconscious should not in any circumstances be understood as an agency capable of intelligent thought and volitional activity and by his determination to show that the operations of the primary process are not reducible to rhetorical operations, as Lacan deems them to be when, in 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious, or reason since Freud',[14] he argues that condensation and displacement coincide respectively with metaphor and metonymy.

Having no truck with Lacan's idea that the unconscious is structured like a language, Lyotard conceives the unconscious as a prelinguistic formation which comes into existence as a result of the simultaneity of primal desire and its repression. This event occurs before the subject is capable of articulate thought, and as such establishes itself in a form that

is other than articulate thought. Hence, the processes that issue from the unconscious must also be understood as functioning independently of such thought. In the chapter entitled 'Connivances of desire with the figural', Lyotard conceives of the unconscious as a 'matrix', writing:

> the matrix-figure is no more visible than it is legible. It does not belong to plastic space any more than it does to textual space. It is difference itself, and as such, does not allow a minimal amount of structural polarity which its verbalization would require, or the minimal amount of construction without which its plastic expression as image or form cannot be obtained.[15]

15 Lyotard, 'The connivances of desire', p. 65.

Something like a mimetic machine, the matrix acts as a force that attracts the contents of the psyche and impresses itself upon them, transforming them, almost in a physical way, into its own image. For Lyotard then the figural, at least when it comes to the unconscious, is what is *almost* physical. It is an *implied physicality* then that characterizes the figural operations of the unconscious. What differentiates these *figural* operations from the figurative ones of language is that the transformations of the figural are not undertaken with the aim of producing meaning, but in order to destroy it and disguise it. In the dream, for example, the energetics of unconscious desire combine with figurality to destroy the relation between signification and meaning that structures the discursive dream-thoughts. Figurality comes into play in the relation between the dream thoughts and the dream-work:

> It is advisable, if one wants truly to grasp Freud's intention, to take seriously the opposition he establishes between the dream-thoughts and dream-work (*Gedanke* and *Arbeit*), and the transformative action of the dream. The *discourse* which resides at the heart of the dream is the object of this work, its raw material.[16]

16 Lyotard, 'The dream-work does not think', pp. 20–21. Emphasis mine.

More definitely than Freud himself does, Lyotard establishes the discursive and figural dimensions of both the latent and manifest content of the dream and how one content is *refigured* as the other. The dream-thoughts are more or less discursive, while the dream-work is figural. The discursive dream-thoughts comprise the raw material that the dream-work operates upon in order to produce the manifest content of the dream.[17] The dream-work, on the other hand, is a kind of labour; it works over the text of the dream-thoughts in a quasi-physical way. The dream-thoughts are transformed not by recourse to their meaning but because the unique operations of dream-work – condensation, displacement, considerations of representability and secondary revision – seize upon the organizational structure or the figurative dimension of discourse and subject it to quasi-physical processes.

17 While Lyotard calls these thoughts discursive, it does not follow that they are intelligible. The dream-thoughts cannot be intelligible discourse because the unconscious is not an intelligent thinking agency.

The chapter of *Discours, figure* entitled 'The dream-work does not think' elaborates each of the primary processes in order to demonstrate the operation of figurality. It is worth reiterating the *figural* dimension of these processes here in order to heed their *quasi-physical* makeup.

Condensation compresses the figurative space of discourse that otherwise ensures its readability – the space of both the signifier–signified relation and the sign–referent relation. Displacement reinforces some zones of the text so that they are preserved despite the compressive force of condensation. Concerning considerations of representability, Lyotard refers to Freud's notion of a conversion of the linguistic text into a pictographic script, but he also writes of a visibility which, no longer visual, haunts the configuration of the dream. Secondary revision simultaneously ensures that the text violated by the other three operations nevertheless appears to make sense. Freud writes of the manner in which secondary revision supplements the limited representational capacity of the pictographic dream images with the additions of logic and causality imparted by the analysand; whereas Lyotard describes the manner in which the revision flattens out the upheavals of the other operations to ensure a semblance of sense, thereby appealing to a plastic operation on the material substance of the dream. While secondary revision endows the dream with the semblance of intelligibility, in relation to the dream-thoughts this intelligibility is meaningless.

The import of Freud's invention and formulation of the operations of the dream-work is not to be underestimated. As Lyotard more than sufficiently demonstrates, these operations provide a means of understanding how processes that are neither linguistic nor rhetorical are embedded in sense and impact upon meaning and non-meaning. Such operations, far from simply partaking in an abstract transgression of sense, can be examined and analyzed in order to account for the relation between sense and nonsense. Their facility is nowhere more evident than in the extent to which they form the basis of the psychoanalytic method.

As operations that form the dream, however, the primary processes exist only as inferences. As we noted, Lyotard's emphasis on the physicality of figurality in his reading of Freud is a quasi-physicality. For there are no actual physical thoughts that the dream-work transforms. At the same time, Freud's idea of visuality in 'considerations of representability' is an *implied visuality*. There is, in fact, no visible evidence of a pictographic script. Lyotard's repeated reference to aesthetic examples in order to back up his arguments about the figurality of the dream-work is, in this regard, noteworthy. In so doing, he demonstrates that the primary processes have a reality in the world of culture that is palpable.

The figurality of the comic

Lyotard's insight into the specificity of the operations of the unconscious can be further developed in relation to the aesthetics of the comic. Some five years after Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* he published *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. The significance of the connection between these two works is evident in Samuel Weber's observation that Freud, in fact, developed his theory of the joke to prove

18 Samuel Weber, 'The divaricator:
remarks on Freud's Witz', *Glyph:
Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*,
no. 1 (1977).

to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess that the witty nature of dreams was not a projection on his part but the result of the peculiar structure of the psyche.[18] In this respect, the book on the joke is intended to alleviate the scepticism of those not completely convinced that the proof of the existence of the unconscious is to be found in the analysis of the dream. For Freud, the joke, like other compromise formations, emerges from the unconscious strata of the psyche.

But Freud's book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* also represents a substantial contribution to the theory of the comic. Indeed, Freud's commitment of 300-odd pages to a discussion and theorization of the *Witz* makes it one of the most extensive treatments of the aesthetics of the comic. In order to understand the ramifications of Freud's theory of the joke, it is therefore necessary to pay at least some attention to how the joke fits within, and contributes to, the history and theory of the comic. In the following discussion, we will see that the Freudian joke, considered in the light of Lyotard's interpretation of the operation of the primary process, constitutes a fundamental revision of previous theories of the comic. Read through Lyotard's work, it becomes evident that Freud makes possible a more figural account of the comic than earlier thinkers.

Freud theorizes the joke first by extracting it from the comic in general, then by opposing it to the comic point for point, only to return to it later, in order to reconsider it as something which benefits to a limited extent from the explanatory value of the theory of the comic. Two not entirely separate concepts of the comic are thereby implied: on the one hand, a broad genre of humorous incidents which includes the joke, on the other, a specific aesthetic technique that can be distinguished from the joke. (Hereafter, I will use *the comic* to signify the form which can be opposed to the joke.) Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik give a succinct and schematic breakdown of some of the most significant differences between the joke and *the comic*, noting three broad areas within which the two forms can be distinguished – semiotic status, structure of address and level of psychical involvement:

> a joke is *made* (constructed, produced); it exists only in utterance; and its immediate material is language and signs. *The comic* by contrast is *witnessed* (discovered, observed). It can exist, beyond the realm of formal utterances, in situations encountered in everyday life. Jokes characteristically involve a tripartite structure of address: the joker, his or her addressee, and the target or butt of the joke. *The comic* involves only the observer and the observed (a perceiver and a butt). Jokes can be divided into two main kinds: 'tendentious' and 'innocent' jokes. 'Innocent' jokes derive their pleasures from technique . . . 'tendentious' jokes involve an additional source of pleasure . . . the pleasurable articulation of aggressive and erotic wishes, and, thus, the pleasurable circumvention of repression. The pleasures of *the comic* derive from a process of comparison, in which the difference between the superior position and capacities of the observer and the inferior

19 Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 72. Emphasis in original, except for the italicization of *the comic*, which is mine.

20 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 6, trans. and ed. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) p. 261.

21 Ibid., p. 261 Caricature degrades the object by representing a general impression by a single trait; parody and travesty by destroying the unity of something (for example, 'people's characters as we know them and their speeches and actions'), by replacing something superior with something inferior. Ibid., pp. 260, 262.

22 Ibid., p. 263.

23 Ibid., p. 270.

position and capacities of the observed results from an economy of psychic energy in the observer which is discharged by laughter. In its articulation of repressed wishes across the mechanisms of language, the joke is marked by its central involvement of the unconscious and the primary processes. *The comic*, by contrast, tends mainly to involve the conscious and preconscious systems of the mind.[19]

Neale and Krutnik are quite right to suggest that Freud defines *the comic* as something that is observed rather than made, but they ignore his subsequent qualification that *the comic* can also be made. Freud includes in the category of *the comic* which is made the ability to make other people comic by putting them in comic situations, or by simulating their speech and mannerisms through mimicry, caricature, parody, travesty and unmasking.[20]

They also fail to notice that *comic* comparison relies upon the technique of degradation. *The comic* according to Freud is formed by the degradation of a person, thing or concept. Caricature, parody and travesty, for example, work by diminishing the power of people and objects who are exalted, have authority or are in one way or another sublime.[21] The exposure of psychical automatism and unmasking in general involve degradation by bringing to light the deception of a person or thing that has authority under false pretences,[22] while mimicry is degradation through the exaggeration of features that are not in themselves significant.[23]

It is when it comes to accounting for how this technique of degradation gives rise to pleasure that Freud envisages a preconscious comparison on the part of the person who finds something to be *comic*, a comparison between the object and its standard, between, in other words, the 'is' and the 'ought'. Freud's identification of degradation and comparison as essential aspects of *the comic* means that his theory of *the comic* complies with the tradition established by Aristotle and followed almost without exception until Bergson. In short, comic degradation conceives what is funny to be less than something (whether it be the normative, the ideal or the real).

Understood by Freud as a compromise formation, the joke, by contrast, uses the operations of the primary processes that he 'discovered' in his theorization of the dream. By reading Freud's work on the joke through *Discours, Figure* it becomes evident that the theory of the joke extends previous conceptions of *the comic* based on comparison to *an aesthetic with a transformative capacity*. Condensation and displacement are the techniques responsible for this transformation.

Freud divides jokes into two species in accordance with the unconscious operations of condensation and displacement. Condensation jokes employ the formation of composites with or without modification or make multiple use of the same material. Displacement jokes involve the diversion of sense (as in the non sequitur). Freud differentiates between condensation and displacement jokes according to the 'material'

24 Ibid., p. 68.

they work with. Condensation jokes are verbal, they treat words as 'a plastic material with which one can do all kinds of things',[24] whereas displacement jokes are conceptual.

Freud observes generally that while condensation and displacement make nonsense of the dream-thoughts, in the joke these processes remain to some extent in the service of meaning. To put it another way, in jokes the nonsense *must* also have an intelligible or meaningful aspect, whereas this condition is not as binding in the dream (notwithstanding of course the pseudo-intelligibility of the dream's manifest content thanks to the operation of secondary revision). In the case of the joke, a meaningful pre-conscious proposition, or as we will see in the case of visual comedy, a visual image or a performative action, is seized upon by the unconscious, worked over by the primary process and emerges as a meaningful articulation composed by preposterous means.

Still, however, maintaining a conception of *the comic* as degradation, Freud's theory of the joke presents an incursion into, rather than simply a shift away from, the Aristotelian tradition. While jokes are distinguished from *the comic* by their origin in the unconscious and because they are created through the transformative techniques of condensation and displacement, all jokes can, at the same time, be brought under the rubric of the mimetic conception of *the comic*. Their nonsense can always be compared with their sense, their playful form with their meaningful content. Not all instances of *the comic*, on the other hand, can be understood as instances of the joke.[25]

25 Ernst Kris's work on caricature actually presents a significant intervention into Freud's theory in this regard, for he theorizes caricature, which for Freud is simply comic, as a technique that utilizes the unconscious methods of the joke. Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1953).

Cinematic comedy

Condensation and displacement are brought into play in cinematic comedy by combining the visual qualities of the cinematic image with the physical performance of the comic actor. From Chaplin's tramp character's consumption of a pair of boots for Christmas roast in *The Gold Rush* (1925), to Keaton's use of a bomb for a cigarette lighter in *Cops* (1922) and a live lobster to cut wire in *The Navigator* (1924), to the reframing that transforms the ominous gallows into mere signposting at a railway station in Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last* (1923), condensation was variously used by the directors of silent cinematic comedy for its comic potential. Where dream condensation compresses two or more images into one, cinematic comedy can combine condensation with displacement to pull the images apart. Displacement also figures as the method by which Keaton extends short films into longer narratives. Utilized most dramatically in his trajectory gags, displacement allows him to inscribe a relentlessly linear form into the most rudimentary scenarios. All his character ever has to do is hold tight and wait until the whirligig on which he is caught delivers him up to the point where resolution can finally take place. Chaplin's tramp also emblematizes the operation of displacement – made destitute by the conditions of modern

capitalism, he is destined to wander aimlessly through its myriad industrial, social and cultural formations.

Significantly, though, condensation and displacement are not utilized as techniques at the beginning of cinematic comedy and are only found in abundance towards the end of the silent era. Film historians generally consider the silent cinematic comedy of the early part of the twentieth century to have undergone a dramatic change between the Mack Sennett era of the teens and the beginnings of the comedian comedy of the twenties, associated with such performers as Chaplin, Lloyd and Keaton. But they do so without adequately comprehending what is at stake in the nature of comedy or what such comedy implies about cinematic visuality.[26] Noël Carroll comes close when he attempts to account for the transformation of comedic structures that occurred within such films by contrasting the roughhouse slapstick of Sennett with the subsequent cinema of the sight gag. He characterizes Sennett mayhem in terms of:

> Buffoons, marked by only slightly disguised clown outfits . . . set into exaggerated fisticuffs, discharging pistol shots into each other's behinds, jabbing each other with pitchforks, and clunking each other on the head with bricks. Because these clowns were signalled to be not human, they could be pummelled, dragged, hurled, hosed, burned, and stomped with impunity. Their fantastic biologies allowed the free reign of sadism in terms of either comic debacles or sprawling accidents.[27]

This cinema, preoccupied with the '*transgression* of social inhibitions about the *proper way* in which to treat the human body', was according to Carroll, replaced by a cinema of 'the sight gag', by a cinema of a more 'structural' nature, involving multiple interpretations of an object, event, situation, point of view or movement. [28]

Carroll's differentiation between slapstick and the sight gag could very easily be understood as a refiguring of Freud's distinction between *the comic* and the joke. For what would *the comic* be – as a relation between the *is* and the *ought* – if not a 'transgression of the proper'. For the physical comedy of Sennett celebrates the manner in which the newly emergent medium of cinema demonstrated and indeed delighted in a capacity of the body to withstand any number of *physical* abuses. Sennett's comedies also revelled in the medium's ability to speed up reality and to exaggerate or repudiate the connection between cause and effect according to whim. They defied the laws of the physical universe, while transgressing the value of material existence in general through the ritualistic destruction of objects. The *physical* order of things is the object of such comedy, but only to be negated by the capabilities bound up with the cinematic medium itself.

The emergence of the sight gag signals a transition from a cinema in which the comic predominated to one in which the joke – or something like it – played an increasingly significant role. The slapstick of the 1920s in which the sight gag prevails, relies upon the condensation and

26 Neale and Krutnik argue for example that slapstick or broad physical comedy is refined by genteel comedy to the point where narrative and characterization became important preconditions for getting laughs.

27 Carroll, 'Notes on the sight gag' in Andrew S. Horton (ed.), *Comedy/ Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 25–42, 25–6.

28 Ibid., p. 26. Emphasis mine. Carroll thus identifies the following species of the sight gag: mutual interpenetrations of events, mimed metaphors, switch images, switch movements, object analogues and solution gags. In spite of Carroll's reluctance to acknowledge the significance of Freud's theorization of the joke for cinematic comedy, it could be argued that the operations of condensation and displacement underpin the formal mechanisms of all the gags that Carroll discusses.

29 Such condensation is equivalent to precisely what Gilles Deleuze called the equivocity of the image. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

displacement that characterize the operation of the primary processes.[29] The image in this new slapstick now mobilizes not one sign, but two – in a single image we see both the lobster and the pliers, the gallows and the railway sign. And cinematic comedy shifts from a straightforward celebration of the deceit of appearances and the negation of the epistemological *connection* between vision and truth that characterized the Sennett era, to a contemplation and exposition of the ramifications of the *disconnection* between vision and truth. Understood in terms of *the comic*, the utilization of the 'sight gag' is thus a second step in cinema's exploration of its potential 'to deceive' and to make its audiences laugh at the same time. But understood from a Lyotardian perspective on the joke, the sight gag signals the emergence of figurality in cinema.

The figurality that characterizes the comedies at the end of the silent era prompts one to question how cinema might have developed had not the advent of the 'talkie' directed its evolution towards an aesthetic of realism. Increasingly, emphasis came to be placed on the versimilitude realism of the image on the one hand and the virtuosity of cinematic technique on the other, while the apparatus became so involved with its own technical possibilities that it limited the exploration of the visuality that had been one of the motivating forces in its invention. Chaplin expressed just such a sentiment at the beginning of the sound period, around the time that he directed *City Lights*, when he publicly declared that talkies were 'spoiling the oldest art in the world – the art of pantomime. They were ruining the great beauty of silence, defeating the meaning of the screen'.[30]

30 In Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: the Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 113.

Comic vision and tropic vision

Stanley Cavell describes Chaplin's comic vision as the pursuit of happiness in the face of a miserly and infelicitous reality, citing, in particular, the Tramp's imaginative solutions to the problems posed by reality. Chaplin's imagination, Cavell argues, is embodied in his character's treatment of an object as 'something it is not in fact', a Wittgensteinian 'seeing as'. The Tramp's visualization of a pair of boots as a Christmas dinner in *The Gold Rush* exemplifies this 'seeing as'. Slavoj Žižek, by contrast, suggests in passing in his monograph, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Lacan in and out of Hollywood*, that in *The Circus* Chaplin puts forward a 'wild theory of the origins of comedy from the *blindness* of its audience'.[31] He explains:

31 Slavoj Žižek, 'Why does a letter always arrive at its destination?', in *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 4. Emphasis mine.

> The Tramp on the run from the police, finds himself on a rope at the top of the circus tent; he starts to gesticulate wildly, trying to keep his balance, while the audience laughs and applauds, mistaking his desperate struggle for survival for a comedian's virtuosity ...

Putting Cavell's and Žižek's statements together, it could (erroneously) be concluded that the extended vision of the comedian – Chaplin's ability

to 'see as' – is tied to the audience's diminished vision, the joy obtained from seeing less than the truth. What Žižek calls blindness here is referred to in the terminology of film analysis as the restriction of point of view. Even in Žižek's view, restriction is not simply limitation, but makes possible an 'other' interpretation of the image, instituting, in other words, a kind of 'seeing as'. More important to the operation of the comic in this scene, however, is the fact that the film audience sees the doubling of the conditions in which the act emerges *and* the restricted point of view of the diegetic audience. The film audience, far from blind, occupies a position of visual omnipotence. And we must note that it is not the Tramp who in this instance is blessed with special vision, but Charlie, the extrafictional comedian who performs his tramp persona, while the latter remains ignorant of the circus audience's perception of his performance. In Freudian terms, the scene is doubly comic: *the comic* emerges from a comparison between the *is* and the *ought*; one sees the Tramp as a degraded clown and one sees the audience as blind to the real conditions of his performance. But the difference between Charlie and Tramp also extends the domain of the comic. Charlie's performance of the Tramp exemplifies the primary condensation upon which all comedian comedy is based.[32]

The extent to which Cavell's and Žižek's views of Chaplin's comedy are commensurate is too difficult to determine at this stage.[33] What I do want to suggest is that in spite of the fact that we commonly utilize the term 'comic vision', exactly what comic vision is, where it is to be located within the history and theory of visuality, and what specifically makes it comic is something less often reflected upon. It is worth recalling here that psychoanalysis also theorizes the role of the image in the unconscious processes while nevertheless relying upon a certain blindness. When Freud talks about the operation of visuality in the primary processes, he distinguishes between the reality principle and the pleasure principle with specific regard to the imagined image of visual hallucination. Whereas the pleasure principle freely permits 'the hallucinatory cathexis of the memory of satisfaction', the reality principle's entire function is geared towards averting hallucination.[34] And it is also worth recalling here that just as the primary processes are quasi-physical operations or operations distinguished by their treatment of discourse as a quasi-physical object, the visual regression of the dream-thoughts into pictorial images is in fact a quasi-visuality, *there being no eye that sees the dream*. As such, the hallucination that comes into play in visual comedy in the doubling of the image is an implied hallucination. Visual condensation in cinema works by the performer or the director implying that the image is something other than what it appears to be. What makes it comic is the fact that it is not coded as a hallucination and it comes upon us unexpectedly.

In order to investigate further the role of vision and visuality in cinematic comedy, we can examine the variety of visual operations in Chaplin's *City Lights*. In line with a Lyotardian differentiation between

32 The genre of comedian comedy is identified precisely because of the comic doubling of character by performer. Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: a Tradition in Hollywood Film* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1981).

33 The ideas of Cavell and Žižek remain inadequately reconciled here – an investigation of the significance of the Lacanian gaze for an understanding of film comedy would demand a paper in itself.

34 In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud proposes that the aim of the reality principle is to work against hallucination – to 'prevent the mnemic cathexis' from 'proceeding as far as perception' The penguin freud library, volume 4, trans. and ed. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) p. 758, to prevent in other words the hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction and to divert the flow of energy so that satisfaction can be arrived at which is both real and tolerable to consciousness.

the figurative and the figural, we can in the first instance distinguish
between the tropic vision supported by the film's deployment of such
figures as blindness, illumination and actual hallucination and the comic
vision that utilizes condensation and displacement supported by an idea
of implied hallucination. We will see that tropic vision is a kind of
visuality which serves the film's themes and narrative development,
whereas comic vision operates quite differently. Considered in relation to
comic visuality, Chaplin's inclination towards tropic visuality in fact
evidences an ambivalence (perhaps unconscious) towards the figurality
of the comic.

Set in the roaring twenties, the story of *City Lights* contrasts the
superficiality of the wealthy upper middle class and the noble altruism of
the urban poor. The plot is divided into two series, structured around the
Tramp's encounters with a poor blind flower-girl and an inebriate
millionaire. When the blind girl mistakes the Tramp for a gentleman, the
Tramp goes along with it and becomes her suitor and benefactor,
providing for her as best he can. Likewise, after saving the rich drunk
man from committing suicide, he allows the latter to befriend him and to
treat him to whatever aspects of the good life he deems appropriate –
parties, loads of alcohol, and nights on the town. These two series can
also be understood to institute a semantic and formal counterpoint.
Symbolically, the contrast between rich and poor reverberates in further
oppositions between night and day, present and future tense, the amoral
and the morally upstanding, narcissism and altruism, carelessness and
responsibility, corruption and purity. At a formal level each series is
expressed by a contrasting mode of enunciation. The drunk millionaire
series is comedy; the blind girl series is melodrama, although it includes
some slapstick. The blind girl series requires that the Tramp has sufficient
funds to play the part of the gentleman, and while the series with the
drunk allows him to transfer money to the first series, a third subseries
develops around the world of work as the Tramp seeks gainful
employment. The Tramp's lack of success in this series, however, is
ultimately compensated for in the millionaire series, where he obtains
enough cash to pay for both the girl's rent and a trip to Vienna, of all
places, for an operation to cure her blindness. The end of the film shows
the girl with her vision restored, seeing the Tramp for the first time.

Chaplin's utilization of vision as a trope is apparent in the way both of
his friendships are constituted through blindness and in the development
of the film's scenario from blindness to illumination.[35] Both the Tramp's
friends suffer from a lack of vision – the blind girl mistakes him for a
gentleman, the blind-drunk appears incapable of any discernment
whatsoever. The Tramp too turns a blind eye to the consequences his
assistance to the girl will have for their relationship.

Another aspect of tropic vision is evident in the film's contemplation
of the notion of hallucination. Both the blind girl and the blind drunk
envisage the Tramp to be something he isn't, and more importantly to be
someone who accords with their desire of what they want him to be. In

35 William Paul identifies a third
conceptualization of vision in the
film that concerns the relation
between vision and power, in 'The
annals of anality', in Horton (ed.),
Comedy/Cinema/Theory, pp.
109–30.

this sense, blindness facilitates hallucination – facilitates, that is, an imagined image, unverifiable because unmediated by the sensory organ of the physical eye. Possibly because Chaplin was a zealous Marxist, the narrative of the film explicitly rejects hallucination and, at the very end, replaces it with illumination. Illumination first involves the blind girl's restoration of vision – so she comes to see the Tramp as he is, not as the gentleman she had assumed he was. False vision is here repudiated in favour of true vision, of the visualization of truth and vision as truth. The blind girl's words, 'now I see', signal not just a moment of sensory illumination but of intellectual revelation. It was because she was blind that she could confuse the Tramp with a gentleman, and this in turn made him conform to her desire and act as if he were indeed a gentleman. One hallucination thus engenders another. With her vision restored she experiences hindsight, and in the penultimate shot of the film, during which we see her see, we surmise the entire narrative of the film being replayed, her eye this time being the lens through which it passes. The link between vision and teleology entailed by hindsight is surely one of cinema's most powerful epistemological mechanisms. The issue of concern regarding such inscription of visuality in the film, and pertinent not just to this particular film but to Chaplin's oeuvre as a whole, is whether the film's final gesture towards illumination and thus clear and unequivocal vision repudiates not only hallucination but also the visual confusion explicit in his visual comedy.

If tropic vision emerges from the film's narrative, the comic in general is played out in accordance with Freud's distinction between *the comic* and *the joke*. Cinematic techniques such as editing, shot scale, cutting rhythm, camera angle, and so on, undoubtedly enhance Chaplin's intention to ridicule, his deployment of caricature and his degradation of the ideal. Consider, for example, the context of the Tramp's first appearance in *City Lights*. Two rituals of modernity are intercut; one is the City's unveiling of a new monument, the other a vagrant awakening to a new day. The City Hall streetscape of the first shot duplicates the nighttime shot of the film's opening; except now it is daytime, and the strange monument barely discernible at the image's vanishing point is shrouded by a tarpaulin, while a swelling crowd has replaced the cars and pedestrians. In the first part of the sequence, shot scale becomes progressively closer (an extreme long shot cuts to a less extreme long shot to a medium shot to a medium closeup) to shift the film audience's position from distant theatrical onlooker to cinematic viewer intimately engaged in the amusing details of the travesty. The low-angle medium shot of a dignitary gesticulating flamboyantly enhances the caricature by drawing our attention to his protruding belly. *Comic* degradation is achieved by rendering his speech as cadenced noise, more gestural than significatory, the blah, blah, blah of official self-congratulation. The sequence continues to illustrate the pomposity and tedium of civil ceremony: a matronly 'Mishes Mashen' takes the microphone; the film cuts to an oblique-angled shot showing both the rotund man and 'Mishes

Mashen' bearing upward and slightly backward, signifying at once their moral rectitude and the shallow (simply formal) premiss on which it is based. The strings that had been rubbing away at us give way to triumphant brass, and like a parachute in reverse the tarpaulin shrouding the monument to peace and prosperity is lifted. Beneath, peace is symbolized by a male statue languidly reclining but brandishing his sword, prosperity by a figure standing empty-handed, behind and between both presides a seated matriarch. The film cuts to a slightly closer shot to reveal that the flesh and blood figure asleep across the stone lap of the female statue is Charlie.

Rudely awakened from his slumber, the Tramp has a little scratch, first of his head, then his leg, which he lifts vertically into the air like a dog. A shot from the reverse angle conveys the response of the appalled audience and dignitaries, and from this point until the end of the sequence the editing follows a shot/reverse-shot pattern. Chaplin thereby institutes a rhythm of cutting between the officials flanked by indignant crowds demanding ever more vehemently that the Tramp quit the scene, and Charlie, dazed but slowly wakening, acknowledging the situation, taking a breather, making to remove himself, becoming entangled in the ensemble, freeing himself, clambering across it, deciding he won't be hurried, tying his shoelaces and finally climbing one last time over the statues, before discreetly backing away over the fence behind. The rhythm of the montage allows the drama to escalate in the short sharp shots depicting the crowds' angry jeers and to strain in the longer shots (in terms of both time and space) of Chaplin milking the situation, serially entangling himself in the ensemble until its comic potential is exhausted.

This aesthetic of *comic* degradation, however, is a long way from the *seeing as* that signals the eruption of the figural. Throughout the sequence the Tramp interferes further with the already questionable signification of the tableau, and inadvertently fills the scene with sexual innuendo, exhibiting what William Paul has called a preoccupation with the 'lower body stratum'.[36] The Tramp, for example, as Paul notes, impales himself on the sword of the reclining statue through a hole in the rear of his trousers, poses in such a way as to inadvertently thumb-nose the crowd, and deploys gestures implying that he has stepped in dog shit. The comic doubling that occurs here results from the visual dimension of Chaplin's performance. It could be called condensation inasmuch as the visual quality of the gags provides for at least two readings of a single image.

Condensation and displacement (together with slapstick) occur throughout the film, predominantly in the sequences detailing the escapades of Chaplin and the drunk. The nightclub sequence is one of a number in the film where Chaplin uses condensation to incorporate the riotously performative, rough-and-tumble aspects of pantomime into cinema. The millionaire treats the Tramp to a night on the town in order to repay him for his unwavering determination to save him from the lure

of suicide. The two men arrive at a nightclub already well-sozzled, drunkenness justifying to some extent the gags that comprise the sequence as well as the overall *comic* performance. Intoxication destroys the men's sensory-motor co-ordination (the Tramp's more than the millionaire's), while the space that harbours them and the objects in it become phantasmatic. In an extreme long shot the dance floor becomes a skating rink for which the Tramp is ill equipped. Arms and legs flailing, he turns into a ragbag of chaotic limbs, and only manages to scramble to his table with the support of his friend and the waiter. A two-shot of the Tramp and his friend trying to smoke cigars shows the Tramp having lost the sense of the position of his body in space, getting his own cigar confused with his friend's, so that every time he goes to light his cigar it is the millionaire's that is in his mouth.

Condensation and displacement gags in this sequence include Charlie eating a streamer as though it were spaghetti and grabbing a woman and recklessly twirling her around the dance floor because he has misinterpreted the gesture of her outstretched arms as an invitation to dance. Figurally speaking, the space in which the dinner guests are seated is transformed into a stage, while the acts performed on it seamlessly run into each other. Comic slapstick thus replaces diegetic realism. The action of the sequence on more than one occasion degenerates into a kind of circus clown routine. When Chaplin finds himself without hat and cane at the beginning of the sequence – the waitress has relieved him of them – he promptly snatches those of another man, who just as promptly snatches them back. A while later, the Tramp's attempt to douse the smouldering gown of a woman with spray from a soda fountain gives way to a fisticuffs routine reminiscent of Punch and Judy. The tension increases when a further altercation ensues between the millionaire and the man at the next table over who is entitled to which chair, which doubles as a tit-for-tat routine. Camera scale – the long shot – gives the scene a fully theatrical flavour. As one man takes the chair for himself, the other falls on his behind. From the film audience's point of view, the Tramp and the millionaire turn the nightclub scene into a comedia dell'arte performance. And in this sense the entire scene can be understood as condensation.

The extent to which comic condensation also develops the film's meaning depends on whether it is tendentious or innocent. The condensed image of the Tramp cradled in the arms of the female statue, spread across the body of a would-be Madonna, is tendentious to the extent that it resonates in the ensuing narrative. The Tramp, like Christ, is both society's sacrificial lamb and saviour. The dignitaries' outrage at the Tramp's disfigurement of the ensemble puts the point rather bluntly that peace and prosperity are not so much the ideals for the whole society as the bounty of the middle class. On viewing the film a second time, the sexual innuendo of the unveiling ceremony resonates with the film's narrative concerns about the shafting of the poor by the rich and conveys a response by Chaplin to the hostility of the middle classes.

The comic performances that run throughout the film are thus nearly always tendentious, telling a second story about the Tramp's marginal social status. Despite the comic nature of Charlie gallivanting about the town, the sequences of his escapades with the millionaire also have a serious underside: for example, the millionaire repeatedly attempts suicide, while the tramp is subjected to the millionaire's unsolicited advances, humiliated at the nightclub and beaten up during the boxing match.

In spite of Cavell's characterization of Chaplin's comedy as providing imaginary solutions to real problems, it is significant that until the boxing match, the Tramp's uses of condensation and displacement are inadvertent. He does not, for example, intentionally transform the streamer into a strand of spaghetti at the nightclub, and it is a mistake that he attempts to apportion a man's head onto a plate because his party hat resembles the dessert on offer. Indeed, until the boxing match, the condensations and displacements that the Tramp performs are not *strategies* of the character but accidents resulting from his marginal place in society. While the Tramp is goal-oriented in the melodramatic sequences, it is remarkable that he is otherwise passive. In contrast to Keaton, who frequently uses condensation and displacement as strategies of adaptation to the problems the world presents him, the Tramp appropriates the operations of the primary process, as Cavell rightly suggests, only because the extreme circumstances of reality mean there are no other options available to him.

This eruption of figurality under the pressure of the extremity of reality is precisely what we see in the boxing sequence. Without doubt the film's comic *tour de force*, the sequence is nevertheless narratively motivated by the Tramp's determination to earn the money needed for the blind girl's rent. Desperate, the Tramp agrees to fight in a rigged boxing match, but his co-conspirator has to leave town in a hurry, so the manager recruits another, more formidable opponent for him. The Tramp calls upon all available resources to diminish the likelihood of losing the fight: he borrows the good luck charms of another fighter, flutters his eyelids, tries to seduce his opponent into taking it easy (this while the camera position swings back and forth between them tick-tocking like a clock's pendulum); finally, failing in his efforts, he resorts to using the referee as a protective shield in the ring. The Tramp, in other words, transforms himself into a coquette and the fight into a dance (and gives rise in the process to the feminization of masculine performance ritual). It is only here that the intolerable reality that Cavell says motivates Chaplin's comedy forces the Tramp to let the operations of the primary process take over by adopting the kind of strategies towards objects that are much more readily deployed by Keaton's persona.

But even while the performative dimension of the boxing match exceeds its diegetic significance, Chaplin ensures that the Tramp's transformations simultaneously operate as *comic* degradations and as impotent means of dealing with reality. This point is brought home to us

in the middle of the boxing sequence when the kind of implied hallucination that gives rise to comic confusion and performative transformation is replaced with hallucination proper.

Indeed, the boxing sequence can be thought of as a series of rising crescendos of implied hallucinations in the form of visual condensations, the comedy escalating, until the devastating *actual* hallucination brings us back to the reality of the diegesis. During the interval between rounds, Charlie, beaten half to death, hallucinates that one of the ring assistants is the blind girl, and that she soothes him and gives him the inspiration to continue. This hallucination, this visual doubling, is, significantly, found in the form of the film and is not funny. It serves to expose the fact that Charlie's real goal is a preposterous wish. The Tramp's strategies, in other words, in no way prevent the consequences of reality from becoming operative in that he is sorely beaten in the fight and remains penniless for his efforts.[37]

The insertion of a cinematic representation of hallucination is a perfectly conventional means of establishing psychological motivation. It also fits well with the narrative's exposition of tropic vision, being carefully and significantly placed in the development of the blindness-hallucination-illumination series. But it also suggests that the appropriation of the hallucinatory operation of the primary process is far from condoned by the director.

What is striking about *City Lights* as a film that utilizes comic vision is Chaplin's position in relation to it. Certainly, his take on the figurative and the figural in cinema is complex. It would be impossible to argue this through recourse to his intentions, but his presentation of hallucination at the climax of the film's comicality and the tropic vision that gives the film its form suggests, in spite of everything, a preference for the figurative over the figural. At the end of the film, Chaplin's desire appears to be to no longer have to 'see as', but rather to envisage a world where there is neither the need to hallucinate nor to use visual confusion as a device to indicate the problems with reality. There is in this respect a lack of conviction on Chaplin's part as to the promise of the figurality of comic vision. Indeed, by engendering comedy in situations of pure pathos, he appears to want to restrict himself to the humorous disguise of social critique. Chaplin's investment in the comic in this film, his achievements notwithstanding, implies that the efficacy of the primary process is, while entertaining, of limited effectivity.

I have endeavoured to demonstrate here that Lyotard's understanding of the operation of the primary process as a figural force or energetics is relevant to philosophical aesthetics not simply in the extent to which it provides for a theorization of modernist artistic practice but as a means of understanding the imbrication of restricted and general economy that operates in cinematic comedy. In art the quasi-physical character of these psychic processes becomes physical. We have seen that Chaplin's tramp character literally performs condensation and displacement. But the visual medium in which the processes are presented gives way at times to

37 Comedy doesn't completely disappear after the boxing match – there is another sequence with the drunk millionaire – but a lack of consistency is to be expected in comedy.

something that has been variously designated as blindness, implied hallucination, or 'seeing as'. We should acknowledge here too that figural vision often works on the basis of visual resemblance, so that only a limited blindness comes into play in cinematic comedy. Indeed, the figural vision that I have identified here as operating in the sight gag concords only to a limited extent with Woolf's idea of the radically obscene and Kafka's appeal to a more visual vision. The comic formed through the operation of the primary processes is undoubtedly the least compromised of the compromise formations (compromised by the unconscious that is). For, as Freud notes, the condition of intelligibility is more binding in the joke than it is in the dream. This condition also appears to be more binding in commercial cinema, than, say, in the avant-garde films of the surrealists. Lyotard's reworking of the Freudian schema nevertheless shows us that even commercial cinema does not always 'hold to the visual' and it calls for a much more thorough analysis of the conception of visuality in the history of cinematic comedy. While the figural has an undeniable presence in the cinematic comedy of the silent period, the brief contrasts drawn here between the work of Chaplin and Keaton suggest that it will be deployed in varying ways by different comic performers. What has been presented here is the development of a paradigm for further analyses of such comedy.

In the case of Chaplin's film *City Lights*, the deployment of the comic is predominantly tendentious, ensuring that figural visuality assists making meaning as much as destroying it, while Chaplin's replacement of hallucination by clear and unequivocal vision suggests a repudiation rather than a celebration of the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement. At the same time, his cinematic technique has discursive and figurative functions. In the first instance it serves visual intelligibility; in the second, Chaplin's distinctive cinematic style, particularly his establishment of rhythm through a complex choreography of music, film editing and the actions and pulsations of his body, can be understood as the comic forepleasure that Freud would say establishes a mood in the audience that will look favourably upon the figural eruptions of the unconscious. Without the virtuoso performance, Chaplin's jokes would be overly didactic and barely tolerable.

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The unheard mourning: offscreen sound and melancholy in *Applause*

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1 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 6.

2 Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, 'Statement on sound', in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 234–5.

3 I am borrowing this expression from Herbert Brenon's derogatory remark about the sudden eruption of interest in talkies. Among many other accomplished directors of silent cinema, Brenon was quick to dismiss and despise the 'cheap novelty' of talking films on the ground that '[the] ideal motion picture should tell its story in a completely visual manner'. 'On sound films', *New York Times*, 21 October 1928, section IX 6, p. 2.

4 The sense of urgency implicit in the montage artists' theoretical proposition is understandable in that the immediate decline of montage in the first attempt to synchronize sound and picture is markedly visible in such films as *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), which inevitably relied upon long-lasting medium or medium-long shots to properly display Al Jolson's improvizational performances.

5 The early Soviet sound experiment, which was conducted by Alexander Shorin, had made viable the accompaniment of uninterrupted sound strip.

> *If there is no writing other than the amorous, there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy.*[1]

When Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov eagerly voiced their ideal of sound cinema in the famous statement published in 1928,[2] what they were envisioning was far more complex than the general fear that cinema could be reduced to a mere display of sensory awe or to what many despised as 'cheap novelty'.[3] To the young masters of montage, the 'illusion of people talking, objects making a noise' upon which the early 'talkies' were quick to capitalize, was serving the 'wrong purpose', hindering 'the development and improvement of cinema as an art form'.[4] Their manifesto-like declaration shows firm faith in the evolutionary progress of the cinematic language, for which they imagined themselves in the vanguard by devising dialectical interactions between sound and picture, or the 'contrapuntal use of sound'.

Though never fully actualized in their own shortlived careers as montage artists,[5] their passionate proposition called for and anticipated inventive expressions to be devised by accomplished directors of future generations. To give an early example of something close to what they had in mind, the offscreen cry of the desperate mother juxtaposed with empty spaces in *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931) intensifies the devastating absence of the kidnapped child. Lang's compelling expression of anxiety shows how sound allowed a new sensibility to evolve. But there are examples of the masterly use of contrapuntal sound even earlier than *M*, and my purpose here is to examine how one of the early talkies – Rouben

Because of the nineteen-frame interval between the picture gate and the sound head, however, shot-by-shot synchronization was impossible. See Viktor Schklovsky, 'The script laboratory', in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939*, pp. 294–5. The Soviet film industry could not produce the first sound films until 1930, and it remained predominantly silent-based until 1935, when the production of sound films finally outnumbered silent films by thirty to seven. See table in ibid., p. 424.

6   See Rick Altman, 'Sound space', in Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory Sound Practice* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 46–64. For the challenges that Mamoulian undertook, see also Arthur Knight, 'The movies that learn to talk: Ernst Lubitsch, René Clair, and Rouben Mamoulian', in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 213–20. Knight notes that Mamoulian insisted upon using two microphones, which was unheard of at the time.

7   Lucy Fischer, '*Applause*: the visual and acoustic landscape', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1977–78), pp. 25–36.

8   Jeffrey Smith, '"It does something to a girl. I don't know what": the problem of female sexuality in *Applause*', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1991), pp. 47–60.

Mamoulian's 1929 directorial debut *Applause* – engendered an innovative cinematic syntax validating the montage artists' vision.

The historical significance of *Applause* has been widely recognized in film studies. The film is best known for its inventive sound recording method, which, as Rick Altman points out, resolved the much debated issue of the audience's auditory perception and established the studio norm for audio recording.[6] The most focused formal analysis is in Lucy Fischer's 1977 essay, in which she illuminates Mamoulian's unprecedented use of camera movement and offscreen sound as one of the most astounding cinematic spectacles of the early sound era.[7] The academic interest in the film was renewed and broadened in 1991, when Jeffrey Smith published an in-depth study of the problem of female sexuality that operates ideologically in the film.[8]

My essay concerns how the combination of the two independently operative elements that Fischer praises, offscreen sound and camera mobility, evoke a uniquely complex meaning in regard to the female protagonist's psychological dilemma, a level of signification that had been inconceivable in the silent era. I offer a reading of the very last moment of the film in particular, in which the camera closes in on an inanimate detail of the narrative space accompanied by offscreen diegetic music. The auditory and visual counterpoints at the end of the film create a highly intricate manifestation of absence and displacement.

I propose that the most useful theoretical tool with which to understand this intricacy is the psychoanalytic account of the archaic mental malady that resurfaced in the age of mass spectacle: melancholy. The film does not necessarily depict the symptoms of melancholy per se, but the collision of the auditory and the visual signs at the end symbolically probes the narrative contents of loss and despair, and reveals the anatomical makeup of melancholy. Particularly important in understanding the semantic mechanism of the closing scene is Melanie Klein's work on melancholy. After all, the advent of new technology was a groundbreaking innovation not only in terms of what it did to the acoustic presence of the cinematic space but also of what it did to its visual language and psychological dimension.

The burden of hearing

Before I analyze the effects of the conceptual collision of sound and image, it might be useful to summarize some of Mamoulian's technical and aesthetic accomplishments that Fischer and Altman have acknowledged. First, I should acknowledge the irony of addressing the *physical* conflict between the auditory and the visual. In the early days of sound cinema, the technical conditions for audio recording and camera movement literally clashed with each other on the set. What Mamoulian and cinematographer George J. Folsey had to overcome was the pressing burden that *hearing* imposed upon the camera; encumbering the camera movement was the 'ice box', the bulky, heavy and overheated makeshift

9 Fischer discusses in depth the production environment that Mamoulian faced when filming *Applause*. See Fischer, 'Applause: the visual and acoustic landscape'. See, for a brief description of the camera placements in the film, Ron Mottram, 'American sound films, 1926–1930', in Weis and Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, pp. 221–31.

10 For his discussions of camera movement and editing, see André Bazin, 'The virtues and limitations of montage', in *What Is Cinema? Volume I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 41–52.

11 See Altman, 'Sound space'. Altman points out that the faith in the proportional relation between image and sound prevailed in the industry as the theoretical standard believed to enhance the proper sense of 'reality'.

12 Altman acknowledges *Applause* as the starting point for the even-level approach, while he notes that even the most acclaimed sound director at the time was not in full command of the acoustic composition of the narrative space. See Altman, 'Sound space'.

13 In an attempt to contextualize *Applause*, Smith names *The Lights of New York* (Brian Foy, 1928) as an early paradigm for the 'dialogue laden, theatrical, static, and visually dull' model of sound cinema. See Smith, '"It does something to a girl"'.

14 The term 'audiovisual' is borrowed from Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1994). Chion explicitly uses the term to challenge the prevalent ocularcentrism in cinema studies.

15 Eisenstein, 'A dialectic approach to film form', in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York, NY and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949), pp. 45–63.

for isolating the camera noise.[9] As Fischer recognizes, such working conditions increase our appreciation of the visual awe created by the promising Broadway stage director. The uncompromising mobility injected into the narrative space a kind of semantic fluidity, with a convincing fluency and precision that André Bazin would have readily appreciated.[10]

The film is also known for its accomplishments in sound recording, which is significant here for the analysis of the conceptual basis of Mamoulian's vertical montage. In his analysis of the film, Altman records the efforts among some concerned engineers to standardize the 'proper' way of constructing acoustic reality.[11] According to the most convincing model proposed by technician-theoretician J.P. Maxfield, Altman notes, 'the image scale' and 'the audio scale' had to correlate in proportion with each other in order for the audience to perceive a coherently realistic narrative space. The solution that Mamoulian and sound engineer Ernest Zatorsky put into practice, however, was boldly simple. Their method ruled that the sound volume for the same speaking subject in a given space could remain constant and stable regardless of the changes in the distance between him/her and the camera.[12] The hearing apparatus was thus given a human-like adaptive ability to even out psychologically the slight fluctuation of the amplitude of airwaves. This fixed-point-of-audition/even-level approach became an industry standard for all subsequent Hollywood productions. In the generations to follow, the imaginary ear would remain detached from the camera body, smoothly concealing its symbolic presence as well as the constant changes in camera-to-subject distance; sound came to play an essential role in the system of invisible editing.

This conceptual and technical detachment of sound from the camera allowed Mamoulian to devise far more flexible constructions of auditory information, liberating him from the totalizing logic of looking and formulaic patterns of visually stagnant storytelling prevalent in early 'dialogue films'.[13] Concealment of editing was doubtless one important result of the audio autonomy, but for a director who cared more for uninterrupted camera movement than interlocking shots, the main benefit was the potential for more organic interactions between two mutually independent channels of signification. What he constructed in the film is a complex 'audiovisual'[14] landscape, in which visual and auditory signifiers make up synthetic meanings while maintaining their independence.

The sound autonomy in *Applause* is most effective in the use of sound whose source is not visible, or *asynchronous* sound. The simple, yet conflictive, juxtaposition of image and asynchronous sound, or the construction of 'audio-visual counterpoints',[15] in Eisenstein's term, transforms the two beyond their primary, indexical function, a process that is precisely the basic principle of dialectic montage. What is remarkable about the closing shot in *Applause* is that Mamoulian and Folsey actualized the Eisensteinian principle through the use of what

later became the emblematic marker of the anti-Eisensteinian, Bazinian realism, namely the long take and camera tracking.

The virtue of visual mobility

In general, the dramatic effects created by camera tracking are intricate and precise. Its impact on narrative cinema, similar to that of the zoom lens developed much later, is activated by the spectators' conditioned expectation that the cinematic representation should produce a symbolic coherence beyond the bleak materiality of the cinematic space.[16] Isolating a detail or extending the frame to a wider view, track-in or out can effectively transform the 'plasticity' of cinematic space to the symbolic dimension, fulfilling the Bazinian 'realist' aim.[17] By visually emphasizing an element within a larger landscape, or the larger space surrounding a small part, it not only directs the spectator's attention but also assures its symbolic centrality in the narrative. Put simply, mobility is symbolic as well as physical.

The camera tracking at the end of *Applause* is remarkable in that it initiated a style that was too refined to become a popular convention – very few films in cinematic history actually end on track-*in* shots. Even after the invention of the zoom lens, narrowing the range of vision as a closing device was never common practice. An overused convention for narrative closure has been the opposite – the expansion of the range of vision – either through editing or camera movement.[18] Specifically, when the camera zooms, tracks, or cranes *out* from a closeup of the protagonists to wider framing, it serves to emphasize their position within a larger pattern with a sweeping sense of coherence and integration. Consider the typical endings in such films as *Murder!* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1930), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (Stanley Donen, 1954), *South Pacific* (Joshua Logan, 1958), *Dr No* (Terence Young, 1962), *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980), *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), *Serendipity* (Peter Chelsom, 2001), or even an animation feature like *Chicken Run* (Peter Lord and Nick Park, 2000), in which the stars display their enduring romantic or familial bonds, set within an open space. The gradual expansion of the static spectacle to a manageable fullness suspends the fragile moment of happiness and evokes a kind of simple poetic logic, through which the immensity of the unknown is magically turned into a glimpse of unchanging complacency, an impression of 'ever after'. Such visual invocations of completion and preservation seek to defy the relentlessness of time and to claim a victory over uncertainty. The all-encompassing extradiegetic music enhances the symbolic unity by silencing all distracting noise from the corporeal world and saturating the space with harmonious swelling tones. Such effective masking of noises and smoothing of crevices has of course become the Hollywood way of securing a 'happy ending'. If cinema endows the preservation of life and longing for eternity, as Bazin contends,[19] Hollywood epitomizes that longing most explicitly through the use of

16 This is why Jean-Luc Godard's unconventional, superfluous zoom in the dialogue scene of *Weekend* (1967), to illustrate the point with a counterexample, works as an absurd fetishization of the movement itself, its symbolic function divorced from the content of what the characters utter.

17 Bazin advocates uses of deep space and long take as the 'realist' aesthetics to adequately replace montage. What he is primarily concerned with is the relation that cinema has with 'reality,' which montage only serves to fragment and 'analyze' for the viewers. See Bazin, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', in *What Is Cinema? Volume I*, pp. 23–40. My point is that the Eisensteinian montage does not always reduce meanings for the audience but, on the contrary, can accomplish the opposite when it involves audiovisual counterpoints.

18 As an example of alternate methods that accomplish the same nuance as track-out or zoom-out, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961) ends with a series of stable shots that gradually move away from the protagonists kissing each other. At the end of films like *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936) and *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis, 1984), it is the protagonists who move away from the steadily locked camera achieving a visual effect nearly identical to that of track-out.

19 See Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', in *What Is Cinema? Volume I*, pp. 9–16.

track-out shots. This is not to claim that the Hollywood films are Bazinian, but to note that track-out as a Hollywood convention responds to the same psychic needs that Bazin proposes as the ontological basis of photographic image.

Such an optimistic proposition reenacts the psychological experience that Klein calls 'idealization', a form of defence mechanism in favour of the good object in the infantile 'depressive position'.[20] According to Klein, the 'depressive position' is a state that is established when an infant at the stage of weaning experiences failure in internally securing, or a loss of, the good object, namely the breast. The distressing condition ensures the internalization of the object of love, symbolized by the breast, which is then split into the good, reparative one and the bad, persecutory one. This normal condition characterizes what Klein calls the 'paranoid-schizoid position', and the depressive position is the result of the increased contact with the external world and the consequent integration of the split representations or imagos.[21] The depressive position is thus a state in which complex feelings of need, love, anxiety, fear, hatred and contempt share the same psychogenetic conditions, and are closely bound up with one another. Klein stresses that actual loss of a loved person, followed by mourning, in adulthood revives the infantile loss of the mother and her bodily part. This state of 'melancholia in *statu nascendi*'[22] involves the fearful, defensive desire to destruct or condemn the bad, dangerous object in hopes of protecting the ego, often expressed in omnipotent and violent fantasies. Another flight-mechanism, referred to as 'idealization', sets out the opposite extreme, namely over-admiration or perfection of the good internal object.[23]

If cinema can reactivate the childhood fantasies and unconscious anxieties, as many theorists have contended, this might explain why tensions in romantic comedies often build upon hateful or aggressive attitudes (for example, the female protagonist's antipathy towards the hero in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [Steven Spielberg, 1984]). The conventional narrative structure of romantic comedies constantly restages the unification process of external and internal, loved and hated, real and imaginary objects, a process that is an essential part of development in childhood, according to Klein. In this light, the final scene's visual expansion serves as celebratory evidence of the triumph of the good imago over the threat of the persecutory objects and ensuing destructive fantasies. A crucial Kleinian claim, however, is that the unification at the infantile state of ambivalence is hardly a definitive process; it does not completely resolve the split of the good and the bad, but rather 'leads again to a renewed splitting of the imagos'.[24] Overvaluation of the good internal object can even be a dangerous transaction, closely linked to many forms of illness, including mania and schizophrenia.

The euphoric closure in narrative cinema in this light is a precocious and powerful mechanism. With the aid of a swelling melody, track-out/zoom-out functions to consummate the fictive contentment by smoothing

20 For Klein's systematic mapping of such key concepts as introjection, projection, psychosis, paranoid and depressive anxieties, see Melanie Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states', *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921–1945* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), pp. 262–89. For a more focused and developed discussion of the depressive condition, see Klein, 'Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states', pp. 344–69.

21 Klein distinguishes the depressive position from the preceding paranoiac position, in which the external object is internalized as split imagos and accordingly fragmenting the ego. This theory accounts for the clinical connection and original continuity between the two. See Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states'.

22 Klein, 'Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states', p. 345.

23 Klein stresses that idealization is an essential part of the manic position. See Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states'. Afterwards, she makes a note of Melitta Schmideberg's finding that the flight to the internalized good object is a fundamental mechanism in schizophrenia, which also involves distrust in the object. See Klein, 'Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states', p. 349.

24 Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states', p. 288.

25 See Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and suture', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1977–78), pp. 35–47; Stephen Heath, 'On suture', in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 76–112; Daniel Dayan, 'The tutor code of classical cinema', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 438–51.

26 See Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Suture (elements in the logic of the signifier)', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1977–78), pp. 24–34.

27 Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985)

28 Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus', trans. Jean Andrews and Bertrand Augst, *Film Quarterly*, no. 28 (1974–75), pp. 39–47.

the crevices inherent in the system of interlocking shots. This function is crucial if we compare track-out to shot/reverse-shot, another major Hollywood convention. As theorists such as Jean-Pierre Oudart, Daniel Dayan and Kaja Silverman observe, the shot/reverse-shot structure is a systematic self-repairing apparatus in which the interlocking relations of shots fabricate a fictive sense of wholeness.[25] According to their psychoanalytic accounts, a single closeup shot within a sequence is retroactively rendered incomplete by the following reverse-shot. The relatively restricted range of vision that comprises the first shot connotes the unknowable imaginary space beyond what is already seen and known, where 'the absent-one' hovers. 'The absent-one' is the ghostly spectator who occupies the complementary field that is not seen on screen. The reverse-shot then compensates for the incompleteness of the previous shot by promptly offering a 'stand-in', a fictive character, which takes the place of 'the absent-one'. This notion of 'stand-in' is borrowed from Jacques-Alain Miller, who contends that inherent in the logic of the signifier is the lack in the Lacanian sense.[26] Not exactly 'purely and simply absent', the Lacanian lack renders the object of desire inaccessible and detaches the subject from the signifying chain. Miller names the relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element as 'suture'. While Miller explicates the central role of lack in the signifying structure, such film theorists as Silverman stress the remedial function of suture. Suture in classical narrative cinema serves to repress any possible marginality that threatens the integrating unity of the narrative space and its cinematic representations.[27]

What is secured by the movement of track-out/zoom-out is far more convincingly remedial, in that the gradual inclusion of the surroundings turns potentially unsettling parts of the invisible into accomplices of the symbolic totality. It is not just the final kiss that produces a sense of completion at the end of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* or *Pretty Woman*, it is the enlargement of vision that authenticates the security of the cinematic phenomena. This visual effect becomes even more forceful when the shot fades to black or yields to any nondiegetic element that signals the end of the narrative, such as 'The End' sign or the end credits. This impact is further enhanced by its role as a grand punctuation, completing the entire system of signification as a self-contained form. Track-out, I might add, attempts at reaffirming not only the wholeness of the narrative space but also the competency of the cinematic language itself, which, according to Jean Louis Baudry, is designed to '[unite] the discontinuous fragments of phenomena, of lived experience, into unifying meaning'.[28] The filmic surface in its ideological operation, according to Baudry, assures a sense of identity by repressing or abolishing the threats it faces. The efficacy of the concluding track-out lies precisely in its double purpose to both function as and secure a uniting cinematic form; it is a defence mechanism *par excellence.* The wholeness of the cinematic space that it initially constructs delivers the coherent cartography of identity and meaning, finalizing the

self-sufficiency of the signifying mechanism. The camera's capacity simply to extend the parameter of the visible also regenerates the auxiliary faculty to validate its very own totalizing authority. Track-out as a closing device, put simply, is the culmination of the desire for completeness and stability, and it finalizes the semantic sovereignty of the camera itself as the authoring and suturing apparatus.

In contrast to the effects of track-out/zoom-out that I have contemplated so far, consider a moment when the camera tracks/zooms *in* towards a speaking subject or the source of diegetic sound, when the frame emphasizes the visual presence of the host of auditory information. In the closeup shot that the camera movement comes to, the body bears an excessive significance as the moving camera overdetermines the synchronicity between sound and image. This synchronicity serves a dual function. On the one hand, in collapsing the two channels of signification it triumphantly celebrates the salient presence of the sounding body that hosts excessive perceptual information. On the other, the excess creates a demand for an expression of the inertia of the overdetermination, or a proper response to the excess of information. It thus constructs simultaneously a temporary sense of condensation and a need for adequate evidence of its impact, as if the excess cannot fully mask the absence. Through this dual function, track-in/zoom-in mobilizes a dramatic tension rather than relieving it. For this reason, track-in/zoom-in is scarcely used with synchronous sound as a closing device in narrative films; its preferred use is rather as a tension-generator.

It is no coincidence therefore that the most frequent user of track-in as a closing device in classical cinema is Alfred Hitchcock. When a film ends with track-in or zoom-in, the enclosing camera movement tends to recapitulate or even augment the impact of the absent, as in some of Hitchcock's films including *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), *Rebecca* (1940) and *Notorious* (1946). Although the romantic relationship is restored to stable ground at the end of these films, the emphasis on specific visual details curtails the evidence of the perfect recovery of the illusive good object. At the very moment of final fade-out, furthermore, the traumatic event appears to have reached reconciliation, but its devastating impact on the protagonist's psyche remains uncertain. Inherent in the final amplification of the traumatic sight or lost object is what possibly contaminates the assumed happy ending that we never actually see. Though varying in degree, these films, not unlike *Applause*, respond to the traumatic event with a kind of fascination beyond the pleasure principle of cinema.[29]

An useful example comparable to *Applause* in this regard is Michael Snow's experimental film *Wavelength* (1966), the majority of which is devoted to an excessively slow zoom-in. Not unlike the ending shot of *Applause*, Snow's camera gradually expels all sound sources from the frame and negates the construction of a coherent and euphoric narrative space by eventually confining the frame to a minute detail on the wall, irrelevant to the previous events. In both *Wavelength* and *Applause*, the

29 Not included in the discussion, but worth mentioning, are *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), *Les Quatre cents coups* (François Truffaut, 1959) *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), and *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980). *Citizen Kane* and *The Shining* end with stable shots that follow track-in shots. The zoom-in effect at the end of *Quatre cents coups* was done through optical printing, not camera movement, although the effect likewise amplifies uncertainty.

30 *Singing in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, 1953) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) are interesting, rare examples of films in which track-in shots serve the euphoric conclusion. Whether track-in shots safely function as a complacent closing device in these romantic comedies is debatable. Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca interpret the final reframing in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as the symbolic undermining of the patriarchal order that the dramatic situation appears otherwise to celebrate. See Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca, 'Pre-text and text in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'*, in Patricia Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomingdale and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 112–25.

31 Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov, 'Statement on sound', p. 234.

32 Chion uses the term 'acousmatic sound' to refer to 'sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause'. He points out that acousmatic sounds can convey 'suspense' and 'mystery'. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, pp. 71–2.

33 Smith offers the first study to articulate the complex interlocking relations among formal elements, textual meanings, and ideological functions of *Applause*. See Smith, '"It does something to a girl"'. He points out that the film employs montage and long takes discretely at different points to highlight differing types of narrative tension. We might add that the finale of the film offers a momentary and concise convergence of both paradigms.

narrowing of vision evokes an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and displacement.[30] Whereas the narrative disintegrates into an array of pure optical events in *Wavelength, Applause* intensifies the narrative content and poeticizes the residue of displacement to signify the wound in the ego – precisely the condition of melancholia.

The case of *Applause* is significant on a number of levels in regard to the final confinement of vision, not least the fact that it preceded the Hitchcockian fascination with ambivalence. If the film does indeed 'strengthen and broaden the montage methods of influencing the spectator',[31] as the montage artists proposed, it also demonstrates that the montage method, however simple the construction, can create a highly subtle and complex set of meanings. When the camera isolates and moves in on a detail within a space that is not the source of the sound being heard, or 'acousmatizes' the sound,[32] the construction avows the incompleteness of the spatial wholeness by further fragmenting the audible from the visible, and vice versa. The 'acousmatic sound', in other words, does not necessarily become the stopgap for the invisible; rather it evokes the threat of the absent-one. Put simply, asynchronicity literally unsettles the unity of signification. As the camera closes in, the two autonomous, yet interfluent, instruments disrupt each other's initial meaning and produce a highly complex third one. As I shall show, the actual effect of this contrapuntal construction is far-reaching.

Almost ever after

This dialectical audiovisual landscape is certainly dramatically motivated, as it highlights the key elements of the main narrative tension of *Applause*, namely displacement, anxiety, loss and despair.[33] These elements make up the psychological structure of the depressive position, which, according to Klein, is formed by the subject's fluctuating relation to the mother. The plot dwells specifically on this relationship, following the ill-fated bond between a burlesque dancer mother and her convent-educated daughter, Kitty Darling (Helen Morgan) and April Darling (Joan Peers). April is forced to choose between her boyfriend, a naval serviceman from Wisconsin who offers a happy married life in his country home, and the harsh reality of the burlesque business, when her mother is forced off the stage because of her age. The conflict reaches its climax as April sacrifices her marriage plans and throws herself desperately into the rapacious world of show business, determined to support her financially and emotionally wrecked mother. At the height of this conflict, the crosscut scenes show Kitty fatally poisoning herself in an effort to relieve her tormented daughter of this burden, and April simultaneously making her debut on stage. April's initial performance turns out to be a phenomenal 'success', going by the excited reaction of a lecherous male audience, who fill her with revulsion. The film ends with a classical resolution as the heroine is saved by the hero: April's boyfriend Tony (Henry Wadsworth), who was thought to have been

driven from the city by April's ending of their romance, unexpectedly arrives backstage to rescue her from despair. Now shown to understand April's dilemma, he instantly reinstates their marriage plans, this time factoring Kitty into their idyllic new life in the country. Unaware that her mother is lying stone cold in the dressing room, April embraces Tony to celebrate this opportunity for her and her mother to escape the degradations of the burlesque business.

The final conversation that reunites the lovers is captured by one continuous camera tracking in two phases. While April briefly explains her situation to Tony, the camera slowly closes in from a long shot (figure 1) until it stops and stays still on them as they optimistically resolve April's problem (figure 2). What the camera stresses when it tracks in again is not the rejoicing lovers but the abandoned promotion poster on the back wall showing a young Kitty at the peak of her career (figure 3); the camera expels the lovers from the centre of visual attention. The unbroken inward camera tracking accompanies offscreen diegetic sound, the chorus coming from the stage that April has just left. With the offscreen sound saturating the space with the acoustic presence of the invisible dancers, the camera tracking magnifies the visual presence of a soundless detail; or, rather, the invisibility of the sound source underscores the irreducible gap between perceived sound and perceived image. The discrepancy between what becomes exclusively visible and what becomes excessively invisible imposes an overpowering and ominous sense of disjunction, unsettling the matrimonial bond between auditory mise-en-scene and visual mise-en-scene.

This disjunction points to the primary element in the anatomy of melancholy, namely the lost object. As the swelling music magnifies the semantic incompleteness of the visual space, the growing, two-dimensional image of Kitty stands in for the uncanny presence of the invisible dead body lying in the dressing room. Further displaced from its source by the indifferent camera, the acousmatic sound places its spectral curse into the frame. Released from its physical anchor, the sound quickly assumes a symbolic presence as the entrapment that Kitty could escape only by death. Meanwhile a frivolous and lifeless visual detail in the background becomes a definite piece of evidence for the absolute absence, its symbolism acoustically activated by the displaced auditory signifier. The introverted camera movement that narrows the perspective to the internal symbolism of a visual detail effectively expresses instability and inadequacy.

Figures 1–3 The growing, two-dimensional image of Kitty stands in for the uncanny presence of the invisible dead body. *Applause* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1929).

In other words, the camera is liberated from the traditional task of the silent era to visually express sound by showing the sound source in 'explanatory' shots and redirects its unburdened mobility to 'explain' an object that is simply *silent*. The impact of the visual magnification is powerful precisely because the object lacks sound. Furthermore, its efficacy is reciprocal, or fetishistic in the Freudian sense, in that it substitutes for what is absent. It is sound that activates the full signification of the camera tracking; the collision is highly 'intellectual' in the Eisensteinian sense. Neither the poster on the wall, nor the camera tracking, can fulfil such a complex function alone; it is the combination, or rather the collision, of the contrapuntal sound and the camera tracking that produces the surplus meaning. The effect is that the vertical montage evokes ambivalence and inadequacy, ultimately signifying the absolute absence of the loved object. The final residue of inadequacy and incompleteness comes as a poignant irony, resonating with the impossibility of resolving the mother–child relationship.

The spectral spectacle of failure

What the precise synthetic punctuation reveals is not only the inadequacy of the long-sought happiness and security that the lovers celebrate but, more significantly, the very shortcoming of the spatial and semantic unity. The narrative space becomes an empty shell of the emerging meaning, a transient material basis for the failed synchronicity between the two seductive signifiers; the absolute incompleteness erupts on the symbolic level rather than in the plasticity of the physical space. The synthesis effectively constitutes a firm and active marker of a system that operates through structural displacement, a system of signification that recognizes death as the logically inevitable destiny, the absolute signified. As such, death almost makes visible the flimsiness of the signifier.

The latent logic of death works through an intricate system of repression, in which the unrestricted flow of story information functions as an active agent. What activates the economy of the signifying system is the ironic gap in knowledge between the audience and the characters of Kitty's untimely death. Once the narrative effectively separates April and Kitty, the cinematic logic of camera/audience omnipresence works systematically to fabricate invisible causality, showing the audience Kitty's death through crosscutting without allowing April to share in this knowledge. The final scene recasts the audience's knowledge of the death as the knowledge of April's *ignorance*. This is the reason that April's celebration of certainty and anticipated happiness is *excessively* incomplete and ephemeral. Knowing not only what lies beyond the wall but also the lack in April at the very moment of tracking, the audience is invited to participate in the privileged system of signification by recognizing the gap that the narrative closure creates. What is explicitly denied in this mechanism is April's omnipotence, a condition that makes

the depressive position even more difficult to resolve in that it can lead to excessive attachment to the good internal object in Klein's scheme.

Denial also takes place on another level. With the supreme knowledge that no character can have, as the audience we demand a new spectacle, not the logical, predictable outcome of which we are fully aware, but one more resonant with our knowledge, a reward for our participation, so to speak. The brilliant synthesis of the camera tracking and the acousmatic sound is a skilful response to this demand. Mamoulian thus disallows us an image of April's mourning, not simply because the depth of sorrow it signifies would be unbearable, but, more importantly, because it is already *known* before it happens – *the event will have already happened.* The excessive evidence of the predicted consequence would have only nullified the efficacy of the audience's knowledge and the economic efficiency of the narrating apparatus. Censoring the coming deterioration of the narrative tension and seeking the consent of the audience to curtail the predictable, the elliptic closure itself functions as a sort of 'intellectual' spectacle. As the knowledge gap between the audience and April remains open, we are mobilized by the burden of our own exclusive knowledge, our superiority realized as intellectual gratification that accesses disjunction and displacement.

This logic of inevitability reverberates with the Kleinian proposition that the object has already been lost in the depressive position. The question, which is always the central problem in melancholy for Klein, is how to restore the world of good internal objects. The curtailing of mourning specifically avoids this problem. The intellectual closure serves to hide the rupture of sorrow, which could have extended the plot beyond the moment of the lovers' celebration. The methodical, yet redundant, delineation of sorrow often seen in earlier silent melodramas is thus obscured in *Applause*, substituted by the intellectual ellipsis that resonates with poignancy instead of insistent verbosity. This repression is more or less a byproduct of the economic integrity of the narrative structure. At the same time, it also activates its own systematically operative mechanism that works throughout the film, namely to suspend the state of the pain by disallowing complete discharge.[34] With this dual function of the ellipsis, Mamoulian ends up sketching the audiovisual landscape of the injured ego. What is left out in this mechanism is April's chance to 'properly' mourn the mother, a process that, according to Klein, involves the recovery of the good internal object despite the external loss.

The validity and efficacy of the new signifying system thus renews cinematic pleasure by refusing to revise undesirable emotions with excessive sensory signs, emotions that, in contrast, early silent melodramas had nurtured within silence. The contrapuntal auditory signs that Mamoulian uses for Kitty's despair rule out the possibility of creating an 'adhesive' relation to the emotionally excessive closeups of the troubled Lillian Gish characters in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) or *Way Down East* (1920), for example. The silent mourning body that

34 Under this systematic repression, even the most extreme despair in the film, which takes place in the scene of Kitty's suicide attempt, is delicately depicted through irrelevant sounds from the street, not by any auditory representations of the extreme emotion.

35 Chaplin did not give a full talking voice to his tramp character throughout the 1930s. He recollects in his autobiography: 'if I did make a talking picture, no matter how good I was I could never surpass the artistry of my pantomime. I had thought of possible voices for the tramp – whether he should speak in monosyllables or just mumble. But it was no use. If I talked I would become like any other comedian.' Charlie Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 387.

36 Alan Williams, 'Historical and theoretical issues in the coming of recorded sound to the cinema', in Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory Sound Practice*, pp. 133–5.

37 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', in James Strachey et al. (eds), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 14* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953–1974), pp. 239–58.

38 Ibid., p.256.

39 This is one of the reasons that Klein prefers the term 'position' as opposed to 'phase' or 'stage,' indicating her resistance against the linear development of psychological mechanisms.

had become the spectacular marker of melodrama in the silent era hardly secures a place in *Applause*, just as Chaplin's tramp failed to embody a proper voice.[35] As Alan Williams explains, the melodrama genre, 'written and executed in the hyperbolic, ultra-sentimental style', was already fading away with the advent of 'another kind of cinema, and another sensibility'.[36] In *Applause*, sound plays a major role in proposing that new sensibility, by repressing the signs of mourning.

The black bile unsilenced

Twelve years before *Applause* was made, Freud proposed that melancholy is the internalization of the loss of an object, both loved and hated, an introverted parallel of mourning, which, by contrast, is occasioned by the *actual* loss of a loved object.[37] The analytic distinction/pairing that he makes between mourning and melancholy is revealing for my purpose here in that *Applause* systematically privileges one and represses the other, transforming the condition of external discharge into a setup for an internalized, more complex mechanism. The curtailing closure verifies the threat of the absence by perversely magnifying its spectral signifier with a flimsy gesture to transcend its threat. Furthermore, its denial of both April's omnipotence and proper mourning intensifies the haunting of the unseen, unmourned grief.

The implications of Freud's analysis of melancholy are far-reaching, and it is particularly through Klein's theories that we can scrutinize the complexity embedded in the finale of *Applause*. One of the crucial points for the Freudian account of melancholy is the opposition of two extremes, in which 'the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to uphold this libido-position against assault'.[38] This dual opposition that Freud maps out forms the foundation of Klein's account of the internal loss of the loved object. One of Klein's points of departure from Freud is her emphasis on the infantile loss of the mother's breast during weaning, a crucial phase in the development of the mind. The feared loss of the good object precedes the depressive position and becomes the deepest source of painful sorrow to be reactivated in experiences, such as mourning, in adulthood. This is possible because the object of love and loss is necessarily processed in the infant's mind as both actual object in reality and internal representations.[39] The process of internalization, in other words, occurs in the very early phase of child development, in Klein's view.

This double structure works as a latent layer of tragedy and begins to work early in the film to govern April's ambivalent attitudes towards the mother. The external condition makes explicit the fluctuation of her mother as both good and bad object. The early phase of the plot shows Kitty's maternal devotion, of which her decision to send April away to a convent is a part. The film also depicts April's longing and love for Kitty despite the physical distance that separates them. April's ambivalent split with the mother in the Kleinian sense surfaces clearly, however, when

40 See Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

41 Smith analyzes the ideological dimension of this dilemma, which situates the split as the contradiction between two social positions, domestic and glamorous, morally tamed and sexually subversive. In doing so, he acknowledges that the textual dynamic of the film is far more complex than the plot outline suggests. What mobilizes the dynamic is the tension between two contradictory social roles. See Smith, '"It does something to a girl"'.

42 See Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*.

43 Such self-destructive aim presupposes the full and stable identification with the good object, according to Klein. See Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states'.

April faces the shocking 'truth' about her mother's humiliating social status. The bad mother comes back as a devalued mother, with which the empathic daughter painfully has to identify. The plot precisely and secretly activates this necessity for internal identification by presenting the corresponding external condition when the voracious manager pushes April to follow her mother's career. Upon this activation, the narrative retells the infantile dilemma and confines April to two practical options: to accept her mother's undignified position and fully cultivate her affinity with it, or to reject her identification with the mother's inferiority and retreat to a romantic relationship. April's choice to identify with the mother, morally justified as selflessness, complicates the infantile dilemma.

At a certain point this dilemma becomes gender-specific in that the subject has to cope with the devalued social position of the mother in a male-dominated society, a condition that overshadows her identification with the mother. Silverman and Kristeva address this dimension of adult melancholy. Influenced by the culture that devalues the mother, according to Silverman, the daughter either displaces her desire onto the father or develops melancholy by insisting upon her identification with the mother.[40] April, unable to negotiate with her initial shock at the loss of her mother's dignity, fails to secure a realistic resolution between the two options.[41] This failure corresponds to the failure in securing a good internal object in the Kleinian sense. The complex psychological mechanism of the depressive mode involves the unconscious wish to destroy the internal object. As Kristeva asserts, the matricidal impulse both torments and seduces the melancholic woman, who in fact is permanently trapped by the impossibility of actualizing the repressed wish.[42] In April's case, however, we might rule out this scenario on the grounds that the omnipotence of her superego is denied, as I suggested earlier. If April's condition includes the suicidal impulse, which is conceivable, it is rather due to the empathic effort to save the good object.[43]

Within this binding economy of longing and repulsion, Kitty's death promises to be a convenient resolution for April in her failed attempt to resolve the Oedipal dilemma, a perfect alibi to break away from the split and withdraw her libidinal energy. The first phase of the last camera tracking (figure 1) celebrates the promised efficacy of this enticement. It expresses the triumphant substitution of heterosexual affection, or rather its desirability, by framing the socially approved substitute in symmetrical unity. It is this lure of the new dependency, conveniently separated from the ill-fated maternal force and imposed upon April as a suitable vision of happiness, that doubly motivates the synthetic sign to curtail the depiction of mourning over the permanent loss of the maternal bond. It thus becomes evident why the sight of mourning is curtailed so effectively in the film. The repression of the regressive wish appears at first so thoroughly systematic, as to simultaneously stage mourning as its singular outcome and perpetuate the undesirability of mourning by both

producing and concealing it. The power of ideology lies not only in its function to reduce the complexity of human desire into predictable effects, but, more importantly, in the ability to make the representations of the effects of marginalized desires *undesirable*. The efficacy of the visual display of the new monogamous dependency and the patriarchal supremacy that it reinforces removes the possibility of resigning from the trauma of loss through proper mourning. Again, what is important is that the mourning, proper or pathological, is merely *anticipated* and never *shown*. Disguised as the convincing logic of tragedy, this repression works as an effective narrative device precisely because the synthetic sign carefully conceals what is absent. This is exactly how the finale consummates the textual matrimony of the symbolic loss of the mother and the rise of the heterosexual cathexis.

In the realm of guilt

What is more significant in understanding the implications of the finale of *Applause* is that the complexity of April's Oedipal dilemma revives the key figure in the tragedy of the depressive position, namely the severely sadistic superego. By proposing internalization as the fundamental condition in the depressive position, Klein places the death drive in the oral phase, another significant point that separates her from Freud. For Freud, the narcissistic libido partly deflects or projects the destructive impulse, which is nevertheless partially introjected and thus intervenes in the protective scheme forming masochistic tendencies.[44] In Klein's view, in contrast, internalization reconfigures frustration over lost access to the loved object as both a sadistic assault against the actual object and a threat against the ego. The death drive, in the Kleinian scheme, plays an integral part in the child's first relationship with the external object, indissolubly in interplay with the protective instinct. What distinguishes Klein's notion of the 'oral-sadistic stage' from the Freudian oral stage is her observation that the threat of the destructive instinct is perceived by the individual as danger and that 'anxiety would [thus] originate from aggression'.[45] Klein defines the mechanism that results from the internalization of the persecutory external object, the authoritarian parent who controls the child's access to the breast, as the superego.[46] The formation of the Kleinian superego, in other words, takes place in the early oral phase, not in the phallic phase as Freud observed.

Having identified with the lost object, the superego – however precocious – comes to play a key role as an active agency in the depressive position, exercising its aggressive severity outward and/or internally. The defining characteristic of the depressive position is the domination of the severely sadistic superego, of which aggression, in the form of ambivalence, can furnish a self-destructive aim. One of the workings of the superego is to push the split of the imago to the extreme. This extremity becomes excessively visual during April's first performance, as she displays a near-schizophrenic frenzy in identifying

44 See for an in-depth discussion of the difference between Freud's and Klein's views on the death drive and the formation of the superego Esther Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

45 Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey (New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 1975), p. 126. The problem of the depressive position, in Klein's view, is inseparable from the Oedipal one.

46 As Sánchez-Pardo points out, Klein has offered two conditions for the formation of the superego, namely the internalization of the real parent and the death drive. The latter directly reiterates Freud's view that the superego of the melancholic is 'the pure culture of the death instinct'. Klein abandons this view in favor of the former. See Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive*.

with the 'bad' mother, the one who has sent her away and is morally corrupt. The opposite extreme in the spectrum of love and hatred ensues backstage as April triumphantly recovers the good substitute, Tony. The extremity of April's split, so severe and abrupt, indicates the severity of her superego's sadism and, accordingly, the difficulty in overcoming the depressive mode.

Applause precisely recognizes this dilemma as the final shot extends beyond the triumph of the heterosexual resolution. What is fascinating is that this taxidermic undermining of grief renders the evidence of the heterosexual substitution improper. The celebratory space that the seduction creates never manages to secure its completeness through the cinematic means. Otherwise track-out would have been the perfect way to end the narrative. It is this irony that becomes the new form of spectacle, which substitutes for the externality of mourning in return. The second, more subliminal, function of the insistent camera tracking is to crystallize this incompleteness. Even though the story naively suggests the lovers will live happily 'ever after', the semantic intricacy of the audiovisual composition debases the innocuousness of this suggestion, posing the question: 'ever after what?' The subtle and precise potency of the audiovisual montage overshadows the promised flight, expelling the sight of heterosexual positivism and hosting the perpetual state of impossibility in the elliptical punctuation. The dissonance built in the final synthetic sign contains the incongruous, yet perfectly logical, coexistence of the inadequately triumphant proposal of the patriarchal hegemony and the incomplete transference of the ill-fated maternal bond; April fails to secure her psychological autonomy in either direction.

This double failure, in essence, permanently entraps April between the inadequacy of the patriarchal solution and the mother's ghostly place packaged as guilt, in the doubly matrimonial contradictions of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, desire and withdrawal. The *impossibility* of resolving the pre-Oedipal split and of fulfilling the promise of the substitute contaminates the economy of the spectacle. The failing synchronicity of the two cinematic instruments permanently fixates the psychological makeup of the irony in the ambivalence of promise and failure through poetic simplicity. The synthetic sign only pretends to curtail the pain of loss; in fact, it circulates the devastating effect of the loss in perpetual reciprocity, the loss that can only be mourned silently and internally. The mechanism that activates this perpetuity is *guilt*.

According to Klein, guilt is the inevitable outcome of the sadistic severity of the superego. The aggressive fantasies or actions against the loved object stem from the fear that the ego will be destroyed by the internal persecutors or from the realization that reparation has not succeeded and will not succeed. Klein stresses that the fearful aggression, the sadistic gratification of overcoming or even damaging the object, is intimately linked to what she calls the 'pining for the loved object'. In the state of ambivalence, the triumph over the parents in the

aggressive fantasies gives rise to the overwhelming sense of guilt, the power of which even prevents fulfillment. This crippling mechanism disturbs reparation and internal harmony, accordingly entrapping the subject within the benign cycle of obsessional and manic defences. Guilt, in other words, refers to the perpetuity of failure by means of nullifying the reparative efforts. If the last frames present any information, it is the hard proof of the failure contained in guilt.

The domination of guilt precisely characterizes the mechanism of adults' melancholy, in which the ghostly presence of the mother haunts the subject perpetually. The phantastic pain, as Kristeva asserts, is in permanent suspense because the melancholic subject can neither expel the mother nor overturn the separation.[47] Inherent in her silence and modesty is the supremacy of *death*, signified by the spectral mother, whose power is unbearably tormenting because the secret pleasure that it gives is never complete. Properly installing this entrapping perpetuity, the synthetic sign at the end of *Applause* quickly yields to a nondiegetic audiovisual construction, the theme music that overcomes the diegetic chorus by following its melody with the decisive self-reflexive signifier that hardly secures the end of the dilemma, 'The End'.

This perhaps explains why the contradictory discrepancy between the two instruments at the end can hold together so closely the core of the narrative, namely the unspoken fascination with death. 'Messengers of Thanatos', as Kristeva notes, 'melancholy people are witness/accomplices of the signifier's flimsiness, the living being's precariousness'.[48] This is indeed Mamoulian's hidden brilliance, to suggestively nullify the effects of the most spectacular signs of earthly pleasures and to '[reveal] the absurdity of bonds and beings'[49] with the simple juxtaposition of an unsettling camera movement and a piece of contrapuntal sound.

One of the most significant accomplishments in Klein's account of melancholy is that she creates a complex cartography of mental illnesses, including mania, paranoia, neurosis and psychosis, which she explains in relation to the depressive position. The infantile dilemma of having to resolve the split of the imagos can lead to many flight-mechanisms, which is why the discussion of the depressive position is so central to Klein's thoughts. It is the variety of clinical complexities that the finale of *Applause* opens up. Which of these flight-mechanisms the tormented protagonist retreats to, we do not learn. Which infantile symptoms she would go back to – whether she denies the psychic reality, retreats to the good internal object (mania), attempts to save her good object (suicide), or combats the fear of deterioration (obsession) – remains uncertain. One thing is certain, though: the external object is already lost, as it has always been, since the infantile inauguration of the depressive position. And, the finale lingers on the possibility of losing the internal one.

Expanding Freud's theory on melancholy, Klein notes the importance of the painful acknowledgement of the loss of the loved object, or 'testing of reality', in adult mourning and contends that the same process

47 See Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*.

48 Ibid., p. 20.

49 Ibid., p. 4.

50 See Klein, 'Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states'.

51 Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive*, p. 56.

takes place in the infantile depressive position.[50] It is the process of checking the absence of the loved object in psychic reality that leads the depressive infant to devise ways of coping with the threat. If the finale of *Applause* confirms anything by magnifying the external reality through audiovisual means, it is the loss of the loved object. By simultaneously concealing and embracing the ultimate loss, the signifying system enacts this paradoxical reciprocity itself. It is precisely this construction which is the psychological content of the concluding spectacle. One thing is certain: when mourning eventually becomes melancholy, as Esther Sánchez-Pardo states, bereavement can no longer be resolved.[51] Frozen at the transitory, precarious state of impossibility, the closure absorbs even the slightest indication of the reparative impulse to applaud.

Scottish cinema: introduction

DUNCAN PETRIE

The critical analysis of Scotland and the cinema has constituted little more that a minor bump within the terrain of film studies. However, the raised profile of Scottish film over the last decade, led by productions such as *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), has provided a greater impetus for scholarly engagement. For almost two decades the defining perspective on the subject was that elaborated in the groundbreaking collection of essays, *Scotch Reels*, published in 1982.[1] Edited by Colin McArthur, the undisputed doyen of Scottish film criticism, this volume articulated a coherent and radical critique of the representation of Scotland and the Scots in cinema and television. In his pivotal contribution, McArthur examines the ways in which the cinema's engagement with Scotland had been trapped within the monolithic and regressive discourses of Tartanry and kailyard. These have served to underpin the dominant images of Scotland: from the romantic vision of a land of breathtaking mountains, lochs and glens populated by noble and fearless highlanders, to the sentimental depiction of small and parochial communities of irreverent wisecrackers, stern ministers and garrulous drunks. For McArthur and his colleagues, the iron cage of Tartanry and kailyard rendered cinematic depictions of the Scots unable to engage in any productive manner with the political and social realities of contemporary Scotland, or to provide any critical insight into history. Even those attempts to deal with an alternative urban and the industrial vision of Scotland, constituting a third defining discourse of Clydesideism, were found to be similarly deficient in their refusal of political analysis, class conflict or industrial relations in favour of a concentration on human drama.

Given the conspicuous failure of Scotland to produce politically engaged individual filmmakers like Godard, Bertolucci, Straub or

1 Colin McArthur (ed.), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1982).

2 The lists plus transcripts of the lectures and discussions at the event were published in a dossier, *Desperately Seeking Cinema*, edited by Kenny Mathieson and published by the Glasgow Film Theatre in 1988.

3 See Colin McArthur, 'In praise of a poor Scottish cinema', *Sight and Sound* (August 1993). This argument is further elaborated by McArthur in 'The cultural necessity of a poor Celtic cinema', in Paul Hainsworth, John Hill and Martin McLoone (eds), *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies/Queen's University, 1994).

4 This idea is central to two recent books by McArthur: *Whisky Galore! & The Maggie* (London: IB Tauris, 2003), and *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2003).

5 Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 117.

6 See Craig, *Out of History*, and Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

7 Angus Calder, *Revolving Culture: Notes From the Scottish Republic*, (London: IB Tauris, 1993), p. 11.

Akerman, or innovative movements such as Italian Neorealism or Brazillian Cine-Novo, one legacy of *Scotch Reels* was the promotion of a discussion of what a desirable Scottish cinema should look like. This very desire informed an event at the Glasgow Film Theatre in 1988 entitled 'Desperately Seeking Cinema'.[2] McArthur himself continued to play a leading role in such critical debate, primarily through his advocacy of a 'poor Scottish cinema' as a strategy for producing low-budget, formally innovative and politically engaged films appropriate for a small country with limited resources for film production.[3] He used this argument to form a critique of the policies of the Scottish Film Production Fund and the Scottish Film Council during a period when greater resources were becoming available for indigenous production in Scotland. McArthur also continued to probe the ideological underpinning of cinematic representations by way of his overarching concept of the 'Scottish discursive unconscious', a deep structure embracing Tartanry, kailyard and Clydesideism. Following Louis Althusser's model of capitalist ideology, McArthur analyzed how the Scottish discursive unconscious has served to naturalize, in a similar way to ideological structures of class and gender, ideologically constructed – and essentially negative or regressive – images of Scotland and the Scots.[4] Yet while McArthur's analyses of particular films has become increasingly sophisticated, his position remains a highly contentious one. The monolithic constitution of the Scottish discursive unconscious suggests the impossibility of any alternative representation or discourse, even within the realms of a poor Scottish cinema which presumably would be subject to the same ideological forces.

Yet there are alternative conceptions of Scottish culture that provide the means for a less pessimistic assessment. One of the key thinkers here is Cairns Craig, a contributor to *Scotch Reels* who has subsequently elaborated a very different vision of Scottish cultural history, its traditions and legacy to that circumscribed by Tartanry and kailyard. In contrast to McArthur's reliance on the operation of monolithic ideological structures, Craig's model of culture is more dynamic and polysemic, 'a space of dialogue, between self and other, between inner and outer, between past and present, between invented pasts and discovered pasts and value systems past and present'.[5] This invokes Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and his argument that no signifying systems are entirely self-enclosed as each utterance in language necessarily draws upon a multitude of meanings, values, social discourses and cultural codes. In reassessing Scotland's place in history as a peripheral nation, Craig identifies how writers have mobilized myth to productively reimagine Scotland's relationship to narratives of historical progress, revealing in the process the rich creative legacy of native traditions such as Calvinism.[6] Bakhtin has also proved influential on another key revisionist commentator, Angus Calder, in his description of 'the Carnivalesque activities of the 1980s, which Scots improvised to defy the Thatcherite threat to their country'.[7] For Calder, the appeal of

the concept of Carnival derives from the sense of hybridity, incorporating high and low culture and mongrelism which are in turn related to the Scottish tradition of communitarianism and to the long and relatively unacknowledged ethnic mixing that has made and remade Scottish culture. Once again the cultural vision is one characterized by substance, dynamism and possibility rather than the regressive and reductive passivity suggested by the Scottish discursive unconscious.

One element of Calder's Carnival was cinema, and this in turn informed the spirit of my own sustained engagement with Scottish cinema in *Screening Scotland*.[8] Following the example of Craig in particular, I wanted to reassess the legacy of cinematic representation in a less overtly negative light than that of *Scotch Reels*. While concurring that there are identifiable patterns of representation with recurring tropes and stereotypes, these did not necessarily constitute the kind of pathological discursive terrain marked out by Tartanry, kailyard and Clydesideism. I was also keen to stress the external provenance of the tradition of cinematic images of Scotland, which revealed more about the ideologies, fantasies and desires of non-Scots. But *Screening Scotland* was also inspired by the unprecedented expansion in Scottish film production in the 1980s and 1990s, and the credence this had given to the idea of a new Scottish cinema that was vibrant, innovative and engaged with the diverse realities of contemporary Scotland. Moreover, the very existence of films such as *Shallow Grave, Trainspotting, My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach, 1998), *Orphans* (Peter Mullan, 1999) and *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999) and of distinctive filmmakers such as Gillies Mackinnon, Ramsay and Mullan undoubtedly made it much easier to strike a more positive tone than had been possible at the moment of *Scotch Reels*.

Screening Scotland was also an attempt to engender debate, particularly around the 'new Scottish cinema'. In mapping the contemporary terrain, I had opted for broad categorizations rather than the degree of close, detailed and sustained analysis that particular films clearly merited. But despite the fact that there now was a substantial body of work with which to engage, very little material of substance appeared. Moreover, the reestablishment of a Scottish parliament in 1999 provided further necessity for debate around the moving image and the national imagination in the context of devolution. Yet apart from Tony Mckibbin's occasional and highly insightful essays in the magazine *Cencrastus*, all seemed relatively quiet. This is why this dossier is such a welcome contribution, featuring analyses of a number of recent Scottish films by a group of new critics. Jonathan Murray had already come to my attention with published essays on *Orphans* and *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002) as well as a highly impressive radio series on Scottish cinema.[9] In his contribution here he continues a line of analysis that foregrounds the American influence on Scottish cinema and culture by way of a close consideration of Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Two Girls* and Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*. Murray's argument is not only highly

8   Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

9   Jonathan Murray, 'Contemporary Scottish film', *The Irish Review*, no. 28 (Winter 2001), pp. 75–88; 'Converts or cowboys? Millennial Scottish and Irish film industries and imaginaries in *The Magdalene Sisters*', in John Hill and Kevin Rockett (eds), *Studies in Irish Film I: National Cinemas and Beyond* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), pp. 149–60.

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insightful, it also presents a major challenge to my own favouring of the profound European influences on the New Scottish cinema.[10] David Martin-Jones turns his attention to recent formulations of the familiar narrative trope of Scotland being encountered by and seen through the eyes of a visitor – in this case an Englishman. By considering *Regeneration* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1997) and *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, 2002), he ponders the ways in which Scotland has been reconfigured as a site of potential healing for a damaged or lost English identity, which in turn is an implied positive consequence of devolution. Ian Goode focuses on the questions of interiority, gender and memory in his analysis of *Blue, Black Permanent* (Margaret Tait, 1992) and *Stella Does Tricks* (Coky Giedroyc, 1996), films that also mount a significant challenge to the overtly masculine stance of Scottish filmic and televisual representation. Finally, Sarah Neely considers the formation of a distinctive Scottish 'heritage' genre as a means of bringing in an explicitly Caledonian dimension to one of the more lively debates in British film studies over the last decade. This also allows Neely to question the ways in which the New Scottish cinema has been defined against the cultural values and aesthetic strategies of an anglocentric heritage genre – a contrast illustrated by the domestic release of *Trainspotting* and the Emma Thompson/Ang Lee adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* in the same week in 1996.

These essays represent an important development which I hope will help initiate a new cycle of debate and discussion. There are many more issues and developments deserving of similar critical engagement. These include questions of funding policies and initiatives, the recent moves towards coproductions with partners in Denmark and Ireland, and the economic and aesthetic ramifications of the impact of digital technology on Scottish production, an aspect of *The Last Great Wilderness* beyond the remit of Martin-Jones's essay. Consequently, this dossier is just one step in the right direction.

Kids in America? Narratives of transatlantic influence in 1990s Scottish cinema

JONATHAN MURRAY

It is by now well known that British film culture witnessed the growth of increasingly sustainable, internationally visible 'Celtic' cinemas during the 1990s.[1] Most prominent of these 'new' British cinemas was that which emerged from Scotland. This article explores some of the (Scottish) national cultural issues at stake in what was perhaps *the* defining characteristic of the country's cinema over this period: namely, local filmmakers' pre-meditated, industrially aspirant adaptation of US cinematic precedents and working practices, in a bid to construct a commercially viable Scottish feature production sector. The nature of this 'adaptation' was twofold. Firstly, it was institutional and infrastructural. Many new or reconstituted local institutions and initiatives were created in order to better attract mobile – especially American – productions and associated capital to Scotland.[2] Alternatively, prominent institutions and initiatives geared more towards the stimulation of indigenous production activity were often explicitly modelled on preexisting North American counterparts.[3] Secondly, Scottish transatlantic borrowings were also generic and aesthetic in character, a self-conscious collective attempt to produce indigenous films with the potential to prove commercially attractive in both British and international exhibition markets. The catalytic successes of 1995, *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, UK) and *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, USA/UK), established an influential dual template for other Scottish films and filmmakers following in their wake. The former adapted narrative and aesthetic strategies associated with late 1980s and early

1 See, for example, Martin McLoone, 'Challenging colonial traditions: British cinema in the Celtic fringe', in *Cineaste*, vol. 26, no. 4, Contemporary British Cinema Supplement (2001), pp. 51–4; Jonathan Murray, 'Sibling rivalry? contemporary Scottish and Irish cinemas', in Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds), *Scotland and Ireland: Culture and Society, 1707–2000* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 144–63.

2 For example: Scottish Screen Locations (1990), the Glasgow Film Fund (1993), Scottish Screen (1997) and Glasgow District Council's *Film Charter* (1998).

3 For example: the screenwriting workshop Movie Makars (1992), the Glasgow Film Fund, the ambitious, pan-European screenwriting and directing laboratory Moonstone International (1997) and Glasgow's *Film Charter*.

4   Other 'Scottish Independent'
    movies of the period were: *Soft
    Top, Hard Shoulder* (Stefan
    Schwartz, 1992), *Trainspotting*
    (Danny Boyle, 1996), *The Life of
    Stuff* (Simon Donald, 1997), *The
    Acid House* (Paul McGuigan,
    1998); *Late Night Shopping* (Saul
    Metzstein, 2001). Scottish
    variations upon Classical
    Hollywood genres were: *The Near
    Room* (David Hayman, 1995), *The
    Slab Boys* (John Byrne, 1997), *The
    Debt Collector* (Neilson, 1999),
    Strictly Sinatra (Peter Capaldi,
    2001).

5   Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland*
    (London: British Film Institute,
    2000), p. 186.

6   Indeed, at a specially organized
    screening of *Being Human* at the
    Glasgow Film Theatre in 1994,
    Forsyth began a question and
    answer session by apologizing to
    the audience for the film he had
    come to discuss.

7   Quoted in Allan Hunter, '*Being
    Human*: interview with Bill
    Forsyth', in *Sight and Sound*, vol.
    4, no. 8 (1994), p. 27. My inserts.

1990s American Independent cinema; the latter resuscitated Classic Hollywood genre, in its own particular case, the Western. While by no means all 1990s Scottish films conformed to this broad categorization, it represents easily the most numerically significant collective movement within the country's cinema of the period.[4] In both institutional and representational senses, 1990s Scotland can be asserted to have spawned a 'devolved'[5] *American* cinema as much as it did a 'British' one.

It is in the context of this overarching contention that I discuss here two Scottish features released in British cinemas within weeks of each other in late 1999, *Gregory's 2 Girls* and *Ratcatcher*, written and directed by Bill Forsyth and Lynne Ramsay respectively. These films propose diametrically opposed analyses of what both commonly acknowledge as the remarkable pervasion of US cultural influences and dictates within contemporary Scottish film and wider national cultures. They therefore allow for a preliminary consideration of the national cultural consequences and opportunities that were attached to the precise material terms in which an indigenous Scottish cinema recently began to emerge.

Gregory's 2 Girls was Forsyth's first Scottish-produced and -themed feature since *Comfort and Joy* (1984). Over the intervening years, Forsyth had pursued his directorial career in North America, a period culminating in the commercially and critically disastrous $23 million studio project *Being Human* (1993), a star vehicle for Robin Williams. Repeatedly recut by financiers Warner Bros, the film received minimal theatrical distribution in both Britain and the USA.[6] Forsyth's retrospective depiction of this unhappy episode in his career was one prone to hyperbole. Prolonged exposure to the working practices of US financiers and producers had not simply forced an individual career retrenchment, it had destroyed his belief in the cultural and artistic potential inherent in cinema *per se*: 'there's a huge discrepancy between what a [Hollywood] studio expects of a movie and what an eccentric [Scottish] filmmaker like me expects ... my perception of film has been reduced'.[7] *Gregory's 2 Girls* marked a self-conscious return to the eponymous central character and narrative setting, the Scottish Central Belt 'New Town' of Cumbernauld, from Forsyth's second feature, *Gregory's Girl* (1981). This loose sequel updates the circumstances of both some two decades later. 'Greg' now teaches English at the same comprehensive school he attended as a teenager. While the world around him has moved on, he emphatically has not. This relates to more than just his unchanging place of domicile. In both male heterosexual and ideological terms, Greg is no more mature than when audiences were first introduced to his character. He avoids the romantic advances of a colleague in favour of a crush on an attractive teenager (but now, of course, one of his pupils, not his peers). He also uses his professional authority to pursue a platitudinous career of armchair activism, smugly inculcating political 'awareness' in his young charges. Yet he himself is not involved in any form of direct political activity. The film's narrative charts the uncertain course of Greg's simultaneous and interrelated

sexual and political maturation. Prompted by the pupil who forms the object of his guilty fixation, Greg engages in direct action against a local electronics firm run by an old school friend, Fraser. Fraser's company is covertly manufacturing torture equipment for use in the Third World. Greg also finally begins a relationship with the adult colleague whose advances he had previously spurned.

Many critics found *Gregory's 2 Girls* a bemusing film, 'remarkable for exploding most of our perceptions of what constitutes a Forsythian movie'.[8] The central departure from established precedent involved the new film's conscious articulation of an overtly politicized critique of contemporary Scottish culture and society in a global context. This critique is rooted in a dyspeptic view of excessive US economic and cultural influence within modern Scotland. Thus, while returning in literal terms to the narrative locale and hero of *Gregory's Girl*, in thematic and political senses *Gregory's 2 Girls* deliberately revisits Forsyth's best-known movie, *Local Hero* (1983), with revisionist intent. The latter film was, on its release, accused of deliberately sidestepping pressing contemporary sociopolitical issues, namely the 'almost boundless power, the power to destroy'[9] wielded by US corporate interests in Highland Scotland during the late 1970s/early 1980s North Sea oil boom, favouring instead the allegedly frivolous pursuit of benign comedic irony. The importance of *Gregory's 2 Girls* therefore lies not simply, or indeed predominantly, in its self-referential updating of a single well-regarded early feature, *Gregory's Girl*. Rather, its overtly politicized narrative project embodied a more fundamental, self-willed reorientation of Forsyth's filmmaking practice, now conceived by the filmmaker in terms of a direct political intervention within the Scottish national sphere.

Gregory's 2 Girls diagnoses contemporary Scotland as a doubly repressed nation. This is so institutionally, through the country's subjugation within the British State apparatus. In a more fundamental ideological sense, however, Scotland is also understood as subjugate to the dictates of US corporate capital and audiovisual and popular cultures. When first seen teaching an English class, Greg's attempts to stimulate political consciousness in his students – 'don't spectate; participate' – are rudely and symptomatically interrupted by the ceaseless encroachment of gaudy Americana. A number of clearly uninterested female students abruptly leave the lesson to take part in cheerleading practice for the school's new American Football team. Not only do these girls ignore Greg's political advice, they act in a diametrically opposed fashion, not 'participating' but 'spectating', albeit in a very specific, glamorized and ritualized form. The early implication is that younger generations of Scottish society inhabit a 'cheerleading' role in their relationship to US culture, in ways that go far beyond the literal. (Proper) Football, a traditionally central component of Scottish popular culture and a key part of characters' daily lives in the original *Gregory's Girl*,

8 Ajay Close, 'The Forsyth Saga', *The Scotsman, Weekend* section, 7 August 1999, p. 1.

9 Nick Roddick, 'A light in the sky', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1983), p. 138.

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appears to have disappeared without a whimper. For Greg, such things are evidence of 'just one more way America dominates the world'.

Significantly, Greg's attempt to indoctrinate his students with an absolute disdain for what he presents as an 'objective' portrayal of contemporary US sociocultural values and behaviour is the only example of his initially dominant character traits not systematically deconstructed as a fatally compromised mark of personal immaturity. In many regards, Greg is presented as simply, if crudely and inconsistently, attempting to relay to his young charges the insights he himself gains from his quasi-religious study of a far more authoritative political theorist, Noam Chomsky, through videotape copies of the latter's public lectures. In this regard, it ultimately proves an illusory irony that Greg's political naivete and material inaction are thrown into relief by an *American* character. John, boyfriend of Greg's sister, has worked around the globe for the United Nations; yet while his personal commitment and actions put Greg's posturing into sharp relief, the two men share a comparable hostility towards the global export of US popular culture and the craven materialism both believe it to carry in tow. Vitally, John complains of this phenomenon to Greg ('the whole world buys our fantasies') in broadly comparable terms to those Greg outlines for his pupils.

The tenor of *Gregory's 2 Girls'* essentialist and alienated representation of US culture and identity in their purportedly authentic and universal respects is problematic enough. Even more perplexing, however, is the text's simultaneous implication – ostensible exhortations to direct local action not excepted – that US cultural hegemony in Scotland is as absolute as it is corrupting. It cannot be satisfactorily avoided or meaningfully contested, even where correctly identified at work, by the members of a laughably peripheral national culture. While Greg can drop quotations from Chomsky into conversation, in a botched attempt at self-aggrandisement, John can casually boast in response of being taught by the man himself, while studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Ultimately, it appears that no amount of local self-politicization or proselytizing can change an unalterable fact of national life, namely that all genuine and enduringly meaningful loci of political authority, knowledge and experience reside well outside the boundaries of the Scottish sphere.

In a parallel regard, certain contemporary reviewers of *Gregory's 2 Girls* also read the thematic centrality of US cultural and economic hegemony as an 'entirely intentional' commentary on a contemporary Scottish cinema 'living under the shadow of *Braveheart* [Mel Gibson, 1995]'.[10] Thus, on a tourist visit to Stirling Castle, John ignorantly asks of Greg, 'did [William] Wallace and Rob Roy [MacGregor] get along?' The latter's facetious response – 'the intervening four hundred years limited any meaningful relationship, good or bad' – is at surface level a neat putdown of a well-meaning American visitor's ignorance of Scottish history. Yet in terms of the key films and institutional developments responsible for catalysing the mid-to-late 1990s quantum expansion of

10 Close, 'The Forsyth Saga'.

11 For relevant detail on *Rob Roy*, see 'Rob Roy', *Time Out*, 21 December 1994–4 January 1995, pp. 34–6; Angus Finney, 'Rob Roy: case study no. 3', in *The State of European Cinema: a New Dose of Reality* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 192–202; Allan Hunter, 'Rob Roy', *Screen International*, no. 985 (1994), p. 23. For detail on *Braveheart*, see Paddy Barrett, 'Gibson drops UK for Ireland', *Screen International*, no. 957 (1994), p. 1; Allan Hunter, 'Plaid influence', *Screen International*, no. 1020 (1995), pp. 12–13.

12 For a comparative discussion of *Rob Roy*'s and *Braveheart*'s charged reconstructions of Scottish history, see Tony McKibbin, 'The righteous, the martyr and the right royal lackey: *Rob Roy*, *Braveheart* and *Mrs Brown*', in *Cencrastus*, no. 75 (2003), pp. 31–5; see also Colin MacArthur, *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2003), pp. 178–91.

Scottish feature production, it is John's question – not Greg's answer – that makes most sense. Wallace and MacGregor, *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, 'got along' famously in 1995/96. With less than one, not 'four hundred', intervening years between their production and international theatrical distribution, this 'relationship' was a powerfully 'meaningful' one for an infant national film industry and culture. These films simultaneously epitomized and legitimized the early success of initial Scottish efforts to attract US capital – whether solely in the form of location spend (*Braveheart*) or also in the form of production finance secured by local creative personnel (*Rob Roy*) – to the country. Moreover, key to *Rob Roy* was a deliberate, entrepreneurial commodification of local narrative and historical content for consumption by global audiences, through selective adaptation of a US generic repertoire, the period around the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion depicted as 'tartan Western'.[11] The textual representations of Scottish identity and the national past that resulted from such a process might well have formed, as Greg implies, 'bad' history,[12] but they also helped to establish a contemporary Scottish film industrial and cultural orthodoxy deeply indebted to US cinematic precedents and exemplars.

Gregory's 2 Girls diagnoses US hegemony as an impossible and intractable bind for the Scottish national sphere: regressive in all its fundaments, yet too powerfully entrenched to contest locally with any realistic hope of success. Consideration of Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* indicates just how selective, essentializing and self-defeating Forsyth's reading of Scottish–American crosscultural exchange is. *Ratcatcher*'s remarkable domestic and international critical successes constituted proof positive that productive Scottish cultural and industrial appropriations of a US precedent can form one aspect of the ongoing consolidation of a progressive national film culture and viable production base. Set in Glasgow during a binmen's strike of 1973, *Ratcatcher* juxtaposes historical diegesis with fictional narrative content, focusing on the actions and subjective state of James, a prepubescent boy. James and his family live in a rapidly degenerating inner-city housing scheme. They fervently wish to be rehoused in one of the many new estates and towns being built on the semirural outskirts of Glasgow from the 1950s onwards, a direct central and local governmental response to endemic urban overcrowding and deprivation. Equally important is James's involvement in the accidental death of Ryan, the young son of a neighbouring family. A game played by the two boys at the edge of a local canal gets out of hand. James pushes Ryan into the water, and the latter drowns. At three subsequent points in the film, James briefly escapes from the dual pressures of urban squalor and private guilt to roam an idyllic but unfinished public housing scheme of the kind he hopes he and his family will be moved to by the municipal authorities. Ultimately, however, bureaucratic intransigence and individual remorse conspire to thwart this wish. The film's final scenes are purposefully ambiguous, because their diegetic coding is unclear. James *appears* to

commit suicide by jumping into the same canal in which Ryan earlier drowned. Underwater shots of the 'dying' boy are then intercut with images of James and his family arriving at one of the new homes he earlier visited. This climactic sequence can be interpreted in a number of ways: as part of James' overarching dream, the boy's dying hallucination, or an actual, unexpectedly optimistic narrative epilogue.

Ramsay and *Ratcatcher* have typically been claimed as evidence supporting a nascent contemporary Scottish film critical orthodoxy that, 'in the best of Scottish cinema, the European influence is never far away'.[13] Indeed, Ramsay herself has argued that, 'if I come from any tradition, it's a European cinema as opposed to an American one'.[14] Yet despite such ostensibly problematic qualifications, *Ratcatcher* proves an encouraging key reference point for the careful analytic distinctions that need to be made in a study of the hegemonic US influences at work within 1990s Scottish cinema. The complex influence of US cinematic precedents in *Ratcatcher*, active in tandem with more frequently acknowledged European equivalents, made this a text which successfully negotiated the often seemingly contradictory demand for an industrially secure, because internationally successful, national cinema capable of making progressive interventions within its domestic cultural sphere.

Of specific interest in this regard is *Ratcatcher*'s premeditated use of iconography associated with the Western genre in order to represent its lead character's interaction with the massive state-directed programme of urban relocation that was for many a central component of postwar Scottish experience. Of James's three visits to the same partially constructed new housing estate on the rural fringes of Glasgow, the first two are solitary and clearly coded as actual. The status of the third and final one, made with his entire family as they move to a new home, is far more ambiguous, as noted above. These three sequences form an interlocking thematic and stylistic centrepiece to Ramsay's film. On James's first visit to the new scheme, this environment is deliberately presented through the boy's eyes as a utopian playground. Construction tools and scaffolding form conveniently unsupervised toys and climbing frames. Unfinished houses lacking door locks or window panes become magical playpens. Here, a child can instantaneously travel from all the civilised comforts of urban modernity (symbolized here by a pristine, unused enamelled bath, precisely the kind of basic amenity James's dilapidated inner-city home is earlier shown to lack) to rural Arcadia, frolicking in seemingly endless fields of ripe wheat, with no more than a single bound through an empty window frame. The estate seems to offer the possibility of a paneless/painless new communal habitat for the traumatized boy. With specific regard to these and other narrative sequences, admiring critical notices of *Ratcatcher* typically praised its capacity to transfigure partially fictionalized, locally specific individual and communal experience – 'a particular time and place' – through inbuing them with 'a poetic and universal

13 Tony McKibbin, 'Retouching the real: Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*', *Cencrastus*, no. 65 (2000), p. 39.
14 Quoted in Liese Spencer, 'What are you looking at?: interview with Lynne Ramsay', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 9, no. 10 (1999), p. 17.

15 Anthony Quinn, 'Ratcatcher:
review', *The Independent, Review*
section, 12 November 1999, p. 11.

resonance'.[15] Yet this film emphatically does *not* constitute a culturally one-sided, if undeniably accomplished, process of textual deracination.

The most clear-cut manifestation of *Ratcatcher*'s keynote transfiguration of the local comes in the presentation of the fields adjacent to the new estate. Playing in an unfinished kitchen on his first visit, the boy is suddenly transfixed by an otherworldly glow emanating from the sea of wheat visible through the room's glassless window. A bravura slow track follows James through the empty window frame into fields that are as much Elysian as staple agricultural. Vitally, Ramsay's explicit iconographic and mythic reference point for the construction of this sequence was an American one:

> James's first visit to this empty house is also probably the first time he's seen a field, so I wanted to give this field a wide-open, almost Midwestern American feel.[16]

16 Quoted in Spencer, 'What are you
looking at?', p. 17.

The very local contours of the political and social discourses and experiences that underlie both the creation of the new scheme and James's initial ecstatic reaction to it are here rendered more immediately legible for external audiences, through their 'framing' within preexisting US cinematic and mythological 'windows'. This is the plenitude of the 'new frontier' and the heroism of those pioneering individuals and families who make the courageous leap of faith to settle it. Local cultural specificity is here self-consciously reified into a universally accessible cinematic *mythos*.

When James returns to the estate on his second visit, however, the weather has changed from idyllic sunshine to rain; the window of the house he previously played in has been glassed over. The camera position from which both boy and audience previously tracked through to the fields beyond is replicated; James, however, is now placed on the exterior of the house, wistfully looking in through the glass. The earlier communion between audience point of view and James's subjective euphoria is forcibly severed. The boy's psychic vulnerability and material inability to transcend his traumatized social background and experiences are foregrounded. In Ramsay's own words, the point of this stark formal rhyme is that it 'shows [James's] loss of innocence'.[17]

17 Quoted in ibid., p. 19.

What many Scottish commentators on *Ratcatcher* convincingly read from this aspect of the film's narrative was a much wider retrospective and metaphoric historical commentary on the blighted hopes placed in the postwar state's massive urban relocation programme, and the *national* 'loss of innocence' this entailed:

> James's changing life can seem to refer to some larger change ... in the country beyond: the tenement life is coming to an end ... [communities moved] to the Green Belt outside Glasgow – a place like Cumbernauld or East Kilbride .... The new white houses and their inside toilets: the stuff young dreams are made of. And this was a hope for many families – to escape over the fields to somewhere

18 Andrew O'Hagan, 'This is my film of the year', *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1999, p. 25. My insert.

clean, new and out of the dark. Ramsay's film is the first to put that amazing bit of life on screen.[18]

The dialectical relationship between domestic and international audience address present in *Ratcatcher*'s final scene gives credence to such optimistic local readings. James's dream, dying fantasy or eventual escape places his family trooping in single file through the fields, towards the new estate he earlier visited alone, each carrying a single item of household furniture. This sequence is at once a moment of universalized panegyric and of locally specific sociohistorical commentary. Moreover, it is not simply that apparently irreconcilable representational strategies and audience addresses are somehow made to coexist for a brief moment. Rather, the universalizing component that makes the text legible for, and marketable to, external audiences actually facilitates the depth and resonance of the politicized national critique accessed by some domestic viewers. The epic and mythic qualities attached to the US-derived pioneer myth constructs vivid linkages with the *mentalité* of past generations of the Scottish national community. They acknowledge the vertiginous scale of the hopes invested by government planners and urban communities alike in mass relocation as a panacea for a range of entrenched social ills. The articulation of such locally specific hopes and beliefs through the epic filter of US cinematic mythology also creates a telling sense of retrospective incongruity: how many 'new frontiers' are to be discovered through an exodus of little more than ten or twenty miles? As one critic noted after re-viewing *Gregory's Girl* with the benefit of two decades' worth of hindsight, the young Gregory's Cumbernauld – *the* key material and symbolic embodiment of the Scottish New Town dream – now appears like 'Eden before the Fall ... you search in vain for ... some glimmer of evidence that this place could turn into dirty realist Scotland'.[19] Similarly, *Ratcatcher*'s invocation of the Western myth articulates a nuanced awareness of the misplaced faith in the New Towns, which in turn became new loci of social deprivation, particularly drug-related, during the 1980s and 1990s. This is just the kind of suburban dystopia famously represented in *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), for example.

Thus, where *Gregory's 2 Girls* conceived of Scottish–American cinematic and cultural relations as an unambiguous process of colonization, *Ratcatcher* discerns and illustrates the possibility of progressively hybrid relations between the cultural traditions of both national societies and cinemas. It seems significant, therefore, that the two films attracted a degree of comparative comment in the Scottish media at the time of their domestic cinema release. Deborah Orr, for example, argued that:

> [*Ratcatcher*] is actually the flipside of the new beginning we wanted so much to believe in when it was spread out before us in *Gregory's Girl*, with its neat, polite New Town children stretching up their hands in gleaming classrooms ... Ramsay ... offer[s] a corrective to this,

19 Tom Lappin, 'Life was sweet', *Scotland on Sunday*, Spectrum section, 17 May 1998, p. 13.

reacting back to the childhoods [Scottish audiences] never saw represented and setting the record straight. It was Ramsay's, not Forsyth's, foundations that Thatcherism was built on; Ramsay's, not Forsyth's, foundations that Blairism seeks to reclad, like so many of the brand-new slums of the 1970s have been reclad.[20]

20 Deborah Orr, 'Young, gifted and Scottish', *The Independent on Sunday, Review* section, 31 October 1999, p. 2 (insert mine).

Such arguments engage with the macrocosmic question of an emergent Scottish cinema's potential to contribute to a progressive representation and reimagining of the nation. The interest of such claims for a preliminary theorization of 1990s Scottish cinema, as opposed to an atomized and subjective adjudication between the respective merits of individual films and filmmakers, lies in the extent to which the 'new beginning' Orr argues that Scotland 'wanted so much believe in' can actually be conceived in dual terms. Most obviously and importantly, she refers to major sociopolitical trends that directly affected the lives of perhaps millions in postwar Scotland. Yet Orr simultaneously emphasizes the extent to which such local lived experiences were never adequately represented in British or international cinematic constructions of 'Scotland': 'but no-one was charting our new life for us'.[21] The second 'new beginning' thus invoked is that of a sustainable, indigenously produced national cinema, one centrally concerned and able to intervene in debates around national society, history and identity.

21 Ibid.

It is in relation to distinctions such as this that the significance of the radically divergent attitudes towards US cinematic and popular cultural influence displayed by *Gregory's 2 Girls* and *Ratcatcher* becomes clearer. In the aftermath of commercial, cultural and industrial advances associated with key mid-1990s successes such as *Rob Roy* and *Trainspotting* and their wider aftermath, Forsyth's *absolute* disdain for, and despair of, the pervasion of US popular culture within Scotland appears a discredited, because fundamentally self-defeating, vision of the nation's eternally and unchangingly 'subjugate' cultural past and present. By contrast, Ramsay's enterprising, self-confident renegotiation of traditional relations of power between historically core and peripheral national film cultures highlights the ongoing existence of *one* specific set of pragmatic but progressive creative strategies with the capacity to create an industrially sustainable and culturally sustaining Scottish national cinema.[22]

22 For a related discussion of these issues, see Jonathan Murray, 'Convents or cowboys? millennial Scottish and Irish film industries and imaginaries in *The Magdalene Sisters*', in John Hill and Kevin Rockett (eds), *National Cinema and Beyond: Studies in Irish Film I* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), pp. 149–60.

Sexual healing: representations of the English in post-devolutionary Scotland

DAVID MARTIN-JONES

There is a tradition of films set in Scotland that shows the nation through the eyes of an outsider. Perhaps the most well known are those which feature an American visitor, including *The Maggie* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1953), *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954), *Trouble in the Glen* (Herbert Wilcox, 1954) and *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth, 1983). But there are other significant examples where English visitors to Scotland propel the narrative, such as *I Know Where I'm Going!* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1945), *Whisky Galore!* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949), *Laxdale Hall* (John Eldridge, 1952) and *Rockets Galore* (Michael Relph, 1958). This essay will focus on more recent cinematic representations of the English in Scotland, coinciding with a process of political devolution marked by the referendum of 1997 and the subsequent establishment of a Scottish parliament in 1999. I will concentrate on two key examples, *Regeneration* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1997) and *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, 2002). Both films feature psychologically damaged English characters whose experience in Scotland serves to heal the ruptures in their respective identities, allowing them to leave, apparently cured. This trajectory is in marked contrast to the earlier films in which the English visitor tended to be assimilated into the local community through marriage. The two films under discussion are also both part of a new Scottish cinema, developed and part-funded from Scottish sources of finance that had become available in the mid 1990s.[1] *Regeneration* is a British/Canadian coproduction that received the majority of its British funding from the

2 Whilst BBC Films invested £750,000, the Scottish Film Production Fund invested £1,000,000 and the Glasgow Film Fund, £60,000. My thanks to Frederique Nahmani at the BBC for this detailed information.

3 Nick Hunt, 'Case study: *The Last Great Wilderness*', *Screen International*, no. 1367, 9 August 2002, p. 14.

4 In *I Know Where I'm Going!* these are the upper-class English family Robinson, who are depicted as almost colonial settlers, and in *Whisky Galore!* the outsider is Home Guard Captain Waggett.

5 Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 191.

6 Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 46.

7 Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London: Cameron & Tayleur, 1977), p. 115.

Scottish lottery fund,[2] while *The Last Great Wilderness*, a low-budget digital production coproduced by the Danish company Zentropa, received 75% of its budget from the same source.[3]

In such seminal Scottish-set films from the 1940s as *I Know Where I'm Going!* and *Whisky Galore!*, the interaction between English visitor and Scottish community served to illustrate the consensual aim of much British cinema of the period. The British Union was primarily represented as a romantic union between the English outsider and a native Scot. In *I Know Where I'm Going!*, for example, the ambitious Joan Webster (Wendy Hillier) falls for Scottish Laird Torquil MacNeil (Roger Livesey), while in *Whisky Galore!* English soldier Fred Odd (Bruce Seaton) courts Peggy Macroon (Joan Greenwood). These unions also entail a significant class dimension, demonstrating that while national difference may be overcome, other dimensions of British social stratification remain firmly in place. So while the protagonists of *I Know Where I'm Going!* are respectably middle class, in *Whisky Galore!* a working-class community is united by the betrothal celebrations (the *rèiteach*). Moreover, both films establish the validity of their preferred class union through an unsympathetic contrast with more isolated English characters of a different class, who are unable to accommodate themselves to life in Scotland.[4] While each film initially foregrounds the strangeness of the Scottish environment and culture from the viewpoint of the outsider, the ultimate assimilation of the English visitor reinforces the underlying bond between the two nations based on common ties that belie any superficial differences.

The ways in which this image of an essentially 'United' Kingdom is reinforced in British cinema has already received critical attention. Jeffrey Richards notes that in films set in Scotland it is specifically Whitehall – rather than England – that is blamed for the native population's problems. Hence, 'the villains are bureaucrats, officials, Whitehall, something anyone in the British Isles can condemn.'[5] The English and the Scots, then, are united in defiance of this centralized power. Similarly, Christine Geraghty notes how the Scottish-based films 'seek to offer a version of national identity for English audiences. By refusing a contemporary national identity for Scots, the films work to present a national unity based on opposition to the modern world that the English can join by proxy.'[6] As a rural site of resistance to modernity, the difference between Scotland and England is again erased. More specific to the current discussion, Alistair Michie argues that there is a subtle identification of the initially exoticized Scots with stereotypically English behaviour and values. In *Whisky Galore!*, in order to integrate himself into the Scottish community Sergeant Odd must propose to his Scottish fiancée in Gaelic, and participate in the locals' whisky smuggling. Consequently, the Englishman, as Charles Barr suggests, would appear to be the one who adapts to fit in with Scottish customs.[7] Yet, as Michie argues, Odd actually embodies a stereotypical notion of Englishness, and through him 'an essentially 'English' consensus of

8   Alastair Michie 'Scotland: strategies of centralisation', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 252–71, p. 26.
9   Ibid.

10 Colin McArthur, *Whisky Galore! & The Maggie* (London: IB Tauris, 2003), p. 12.

behaviour is established'.[8] Michie describes Odd as: 'Not too bright, but honest, fair-minded without being gullible, he supplies the voice of moderation, of consensus'.[9] The ease of his assimilation into Scottish culture suggests that the Scottish periphery actually shares these stereotypically English values. In this way, British films of the 1940s envisaged England and Scotland as a union of one people, with the initially exotic Scots turning out to be staunch upholders of British national identity. At the same time, this levelling union of the two nations was one that spoke more from the English centre than from the Scottish periphery.

But more contemporary examples of this kind of narrative mark an interesting and highly significant shift, while reiterating familiar associations of Scotland – 'wild, "feminine" close to nature and . . . [with] the capacity to enchant and transform the stranger', as Colin McArthur puts it.[10] *Regeneration* is set in a World War I British military hospital in Craiglockhart, outside Edinburgh, housing British troops with psychological disabilities. There are several differences between Pat Barker's novel of 1991 and its screen adaptation which suggest that the latter is more consciously creating an image of 'therapeutic Scotland'. Most importantly for this discussion is the difference in nationality of Sarah Lumb (Tanya Allen). In the novel she is a displaced Geordie working in Scotland. In the film however, enabling the allegory of national identity to be drawn more clearly, she is Scottish. Sarah primarily interacts with English Sergeant Billy Prior (Jonny Lee Miller). Prior suffers from mutism, a traumatic reaction to the war. He lost both his memory and his voice on, symbolically, St George's Day. In this sense Prior can be read as a representation of England after devolution, a nation recovering from a sudden loss of voice and memory, of effectively its national identity. In the novel, Prior's cure is rather complex and related in part to his bisexuality. In the film, however, a familiar pattern emerges, with the process being affected more through Prior's heterosexual union with Sarah. But this time it does not create an image of a united Britain. Rather, the sexual union enables Prior to discover that he (England) can recover national identity and be 'cured', just as Scotland had been.

Prior's sexual healing also occurs in a different way from the novel, due to the film's use of related flashbacks. As he recounts the attack on St George's Day we see a flashback of Prior's doomed advance across no-man's land. When asked how this made him feel, he states:

> It was like sex . . . exciting and ridiculous. I looked back, the ground was covered in wounded, lying on top of each other, writhing, like fish in a pond that was drying out.

When he first has sex with Sarah, Prior's initial association of the war with intercourse is once again brought to the fore. This act, however, purges him of his traumatic memory. Before we become aware of Prior and Sarah, we see an aerial tracking shot of overgrown sand dunes.

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Accompanied by the sounds of machine gun fire and the cries of wounded men, this empty landscape immediately recalls the battlefields of France that feature in the film's opening shot – but this time without the wounded soldiers 'writhing like fish in a pond that was drying out'. Initially we are unsure whether this is one of the film's many flashbacks to the war or action taking place in the present. The sounds of battle serve to anticipate the flashback that follows. Cutting from the scene of Prior having sex with Sarah, we are presented with an image of him standing alone, surveying no-man's land just as he previously remembered it. This time however, when he turns and looks back his dead comrades are no longer there. Instead no-man's land is now empty. Thus, by replacing the traumatic memory of the war with the regenerative act of intercourse, the ghosts of Prior's past are exorcized. Through this temporary sexual union, Scotland shows Prior (read England) that it is possible to recreate identity, even after what is seen to be a national loss.

Furthermore, through the act of sex Prior is remasculinized. As Elaine Showalter notes, shellshock was the first officially diagnosed instance of male hysteria, a condition previously considered essentially feminine.[11] Indeed as Cahill and Norden argue, mutism is a disability that cinema typically associates with women.[12] Prior's regeneration, then, recuperates his masculinity, an act which allegorically demonstrates England's capacity to (re)conceive of itself as a nation. This it does in two ways – firstly by absolving Prior of any guilt for England's loss of status at the heart of Britain. This occurs when he realizes that his sudden loss of command was not his fault, but the result of a gradual erosion of his power. Secondly, it associates his brief sexual union with Sarah with maternal comfort and the rebirth of tradition. When Prior and Sarah first kiss they are in a church. Sitting on the tomb of a long-dead Scottish soldier, Sarah, having initially repelled Prior's advances, now places his hand tenderly on her breast. He then rests his head there. Here the Englishman's pain is released as his Scottish lover performs a comforting, maternal role on the tomb of the Scottish soldier. This symbolic act reconnects the damaged Prior to a sense of tradition, a recuperation through quasi-maternal support that is reinforced by the film's final image of Prior in bed with Sarah, his sleeping head again resting on her breast. Post-devolutionary England lives on in the film, due to its regeneration in therapeutic Scotland.

Like *Regeneration*, *The Last Great Wilderness* is also set in a commune in Scotland in which people are coping with a variety of psychological traumas. It is similarly concerned with the rejuvenation of its English protagonist, Charlie (Alastair Mackenzie), who is associated throughout with a butterfly, a creature transformed, or reborn into beauty. Charlie travels to Scotland to burn down the house of the man for whom his wife has left him, and thereby overcome his grief over a separation, or loss of identity. However, instead of revenge he finds acceptance, and is briefly integrated into the Scottish community. This acceptance enables him to give up his arsonist aims, and return to England. Once again

11 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (New York, NY: Virago, 1985), pp. 167–94.
12 Madelaine A. Cahill and Martin F. Norden, 'Hollywood's portrayals of disabled women', in Asha Hans and Annie Patri (eds), *Women, Disability and Identity* (London: Sage, 2003), pp. 56–75.

recuperation is facilitated by heterosexual union, this time between Charlie and Claire (Victoria Smurfit), a member of the commune. As in *Regeneration*, the sexual relationship is seen as a curative act for the Englishman. For instance, as Charlie ejaculates for the first time we are treated to a close up of a tear rolling down his cheek. Moreover, there is an exact match created between the image of Prior and Sarah in bed, and Charlie and Claire. Again coming right at the end of the film, Charlie rests with his head on Claire's breast in an almost identical position to that of Prior in *Regeneration*.

   The Last Great Wilderness is a road movie/horror hybrid that deploys aspects of these popular genres to contrast post-devolutionary England and Scotland. Cohan and Hark argue that road movies usually emerge at a time of national crisis, during 'periods of upheaval and dislocation', especially in 'eras where the culture is re-evaluating a just-closed period of national unity.'[13] Here an English character visiting Scotland is seen to be 're-evaluating a just-closed period of national unity' after devolution. With a narrative that quickly moves between the two countries, this road movie contrasts the acceptance and denial of difference that exists in Scotland and England. In this respect the film is similar to the slightly earlier road movie, *Hold Back the Night* (Phil Davis, 1999). Here, drawing on the tradition of representing Scotland as a rural idyll, the destruction of the English countryside is deliberately contrasted with the freedom found in the Scottish countryside. Indeed, here again the protagonist, a disturbed young English woman, is reborn in Scotland after being rescued from a Highland stream. Typically she is then able to unite with her new Scottish boyfriend, and ultimately return to England to save her sister from their abusive father. In *The Last Great Wilderness* a similar contrast between the two nations is created but this time – developing the sexual theme of *Regeneration* – through a metaphorical examination of differing attitudes towards sexuality. For instance, due to a misunderstanding in service station lavatories in England, Charlie is attacked by a gay-bashing Englishman. In contrast, on arriving at the Scottish commune Charlie finds that a self-confessed paedophile is able to openly talk through his problems, and a single mother confidently entrusts her son to his care at bedtime. This functions allegorically to emphasize that the acceptance of difference is more readily available in Scotland than it is in England. Scotland is a nation that has come to terms with its own difference from England, long before the end of Britain. England, by contrast, is still violently aggrieved when confronted with its own difference, in denial of its lost status at the heart of Britain.

   The film also self-consciously plays upon and deconstructs previous aspects of cult British horror film *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) in which Highland policeman Howie (Edward Woodward) arrives on the remote Scottish island of Summerisle, is unable to integrate himself into the community and, as a Christian virgin, denies himself the sexual union offered by Willow (Britt Ekland). As a consequence he is sacrificed to pagan gods in a giant wicker effigy.

With a self-consciousness typical of the contemporary horror film, *The Last Great Wilderness* debunks the notion that the Scottish are threatening, pagan murderers, and thereby enables the English outsider to interact with them. One example involves a sight gag in which Charlie, convinced by now that he has encountered a weird, Druidic cult, hastily gathers up his companion, Vincente (Jonny Phillips), whispering: 'We have gotta get out of here man, they're preparing some kind of ritual sacrifice'. As they attempt to leave, however, they are met at the front door by commune dwellers carrying pitch forks, axes and spades. They inform them of the 'good news' that their car is to be towed away, and persuade them to come into the woods with them. It transpires that the 'pagans' simply wish their visitors to join them in their mourning rituals. Noticeably this is a muted version of the Beltane festival (which also appeared in *The Wicker Man*), in which regenerative fertility is assured by the participants jumping over fire. In this instance, the commune dwellers walk rapidly over hot coals to mark the passing of the commune's founder. By mourning their dead matriarch, Charlie is rejuvenated, and briefly integrates himself into the community through his relationship with Claire. In the end, by coming to terms with their different way of life, Charlie also acknowledges the transition in his own life, just as – the film suggests – England can its loss of position of authority in Britain.

The confrontation with Scotland in both *Regeneration* and *The Last Great Wilderness* provides the English protagonist in each film with the means to rebuild his identity. In being restored, the Englishman discovers he has the power to rebuild himself – and therefore his nation – after a moment of supposed loss. In this, England is learning from Scotland's historical experience as a nation whose identity since the defeat of the Jacobite uprising in 1746 had been indelibly associated with loss. But as Tom Nairn has argued, England is the nation with the most to lose from devolution. Unlike Scotland and Wales – where the cause of devolution was actively promoted prior to the referenda of the late 1990s – England suddenly found itself in need of a new national identity, 'after Britain'.[14] As though responding to this need, films like *Regeneration* and *The Last Great Wilderness* contemplate England as the 'lost' nation, learning how to be itself again from Scotland. The Englishman's transformation now occurs through a sexual, rather than a marital union – in part a function of changing social attitudes, cinematic conventions and censorship since the 1940s. However, this change enables a significantly different view of the relationship between the two nations to emerge. Firstly, the union is now imbued with healing properties for the Englishman – effectively, it remasculinizes him. Secondly, the union between the Englishman and a Scottish woman – his/England's 'sexual healing' – is seen to be much more temporary, as befits the devolved state of the two nations. Unlike the films of the 1940s, *Regeneration* and *The Last Great Wilderness* conclude with the Englishman leaving Scotland, illustrating that England and Scotland are no longer 'married'. Instead, the therapy offered by

14 Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 15.

Scotland is the realization of difference (that there are now two different countries in existence) followed by the acceptance of this difference. In this way the Englishman firstly comes to terms with the separate identity of the Scottish, and then accepts his own status as part of a newly independent nation. This is the knowledge that he takes with him on departure, of England's ability to function independently of Britain. The paradox that remains, however, is that at a time when we might expect to see representations of Scotland's remasculinization, it is once again rendered as a feminine space through the focus on the English visitor's sexual healing. While Scotland's refound national identity is acknowledged, it is simultaneously disavowed by the masculine agency ultimately attributed to the visitor.

Despite the similarities between the two films, one crucial difference remains. While set in Scotland, *Regeneration* primarily examines the impact of World War I on the English class system. It explores how the beginnings of devolution (which Gardiner establishes as 1917, the year in which the film is set)[15] affected England. When viewed in this light, Duncan Petrie's criticism of the film, that it 'leaves the particular historical resonance of the Great War to Scotland undeveloped' seems more than justified.[16] The film also exemplifies Ellen Raissa Jackson's contention that contemporary films made in Scotland often promote 'Scotland as location, rather than nation'.[17] In this instance, Scotland serves as a backdrop against which the origins of England's recently devolved state can be rendered. Even as an ideal vision of England's realization of its post-devolutionary independence, there still seems to be little on offer for Scottish audiences. In deconstructing representations of wild, barbarous Scotland, *The Last Great Wilderness* engages with the politics of national representation in a rather different manner. Its play with previous stereotypes taps into a commercial strategy identified by Jane Sillars in relation to popular televisual representations in which 'The use of heavily stereotypical depictions of Scotland works to market an exportable product; while the ironic framing of these stereotypes. addresses a local audience as in on the joke'.[18] A similar conclusion can be applied to *The Last Great Wilderness* which, whilst recycling stereotypical depictions of the Englishman in Scotland, simultaneously addresses a knowing local audience by – for instance – framing the nervous Charlie through the tines of a pitchfork. Viewed from this perspective, the pinning of the tale on the English visitor appears to function much as any 'fish out water' narrative does, to provide cross-market appeal. It was thus, perhaps, with one eye on larger markets that this Scottish film aimed at audiences that could identify with either the host nation or the visitor. This would go some way towards explaining the paradox of a recent Scottish production that centres its narrative on an Englishman.[19]

15 Gardiner, *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution,* p. 102.

16 Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 213.

17 Ellen Raïssa Jackson, 'Dislocating the nation: political devolution and cultural identity on stage and screen', *The Edinburgh Review,* no. 110 (2002), pp. 120–131, p. 127.

18 Jane Sillars, 'Drama, devolution and dominant representations', in Jane Stokes and Anna Reading (eds), *The Media in Britain: Currents Debates and Developments* (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 246–54, p. 251.

19 As a final word of caution, it is worth remembering that, as Jonathan Murray notes, commercial necessity should not be 'misrepresented as national-cultural virtue'. Jonathan Murray, 'Straw or wicker? Traditions of Scottish film criticism and *The Wicker Man*', in Benjamin Franks, Stephen Harper, Jonathan Murray and Lesley Stevenson (eds), *The Wicker Man: Film and Cultural Studies Perspectives* (Dumfries: Crichton University Press, forthcoming). I am greatly indebted to Jonathan Murray for a copy of this work, as I am for numerous references concerning Scottish cinema and devolution in general, several discussions pertaining to this particular article, and feedback on an initial draft.

Scottish cinema and Scottish imaginings: *Blue Black Permanent* and *Stella Does Tricks*

IAN GOODE

Recent accounts of Scottish cultural expression suggest that one of the specific and most distinctive and productive characteristics lies in the ability to express interiority. In a survey of twentieth-century Scottish literature, for example, Roderick Watson identifies 'the penchant for dealing with other realms, mixing metaphysical questions and fantastic inner experience',[1] while the beginning of Duncan Petrie's seminal account of Scottish cinema makes a similar claim, through Adrienne Scullion's contention that:

> the role of mythology, legend and fable, the Gothic, the supernatural and the unconscious within the development of the Scottish imagination is not a symptom of psychosis but a sophisticated engagement with the fantastic that other cultures might celebrate as magic realism.[2]

In the light of such positive claims for Scottish cultural expression, this essay will enquire how and where this imaginary capacity to render inner experience is registered in recent Scottish cinema.

Two recent films which offer the opportunity to pursue such questions are *Blue Black Permanent* (1993), written and directed by veteran experimental filmmaker Margaret Tait, and *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) scripted by the Scottish novelist A.L. Kennedy and directed by Polish-born Coky Giedroyc. Both films are the creative vision of women, feature female protagonists, and address the respective Orkney and Glasgow childhoods of these protagonists from the present perspective

1 Roderick Watson, 'Maps of desire: Scottish literature in the twentieth century', in T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay (eds), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 285.

2 Adrienne Scullion, 'Feminine pleasures and masculine indignities: gender and community in Scottish drama', in Christopher Whyte (ed.), *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), quoted in Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 8.

3 Phil Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present: alternative heritage', in Andrew Higson and Justine Ashby (eds), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 316.
4 John Caughie, 'Representing Scotland: new questions for Scottish cinema', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: a Scottish Film Book* (London: Scottish Film Council/British Film Institute, 1990), p. 25.

of an adult. The articulation of the recalled past in these films represents an expression through film of the inner experience of the central characters, with a particular engagement with the passage from childhood to adulthood that Phil Powrie has categorized as 'the rite of passage film'.[3]

John Caughie has argued that Scottish films about childhood such as *Venus Peter* are often marked by a backward look and tend to express a preoccupation with the feeling of loss that inhibits representations of Scotland.[4] The reproduction of longing, loss and elegiac nostalgia that marks such films is staged within a topos of home, family and community, and is often guaranteed by the figure of the mother. The female protagonists and imaginary dimensions that characterize *Blue Black Permanent* and *Stella Does Tricks*, however, can be examined as a potential challenge to this formation. The summoning of the past through the flashbacks of female protagonists foregrounds the enunciation of gendered subjectivities. These demonstrate the capacity of film to articulate inner experience, where the linguistic terms associated with the medium are not singularly contained as they are in book-form.

Blue Black Permanent and *Stella Does Tricks* are not set in a restored and reconstructed past, but the protagonists in each return to a remembered past through the use of the flashback, which Maureen Turim defines as:

> a privileged moment in unfolding that juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference. A juncture is wrought between present and past and two concepts are implied in this juncture: memory and history.[5]

5 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film Memory and History* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.

For the women in these films – Barbara and Stella – the desire to return to the past is motivated by a need to work through, as daughters and adults, their personal histories via remembered relationships with mothers or fathers. Barbara in *Blue Black Permanent* endeavours to find out why family history appears to repeat itself as her mother and grandmother apparently took their own lives by drowning, while Stella in *Stella Does Tricks* recalls the past as a means of coping with both her present predicament as a prostitute in London and her abuse as a child by her father. In both films the production of the subject, and the authorship and enunciation of women's subjectivity is significant. The lengthy flashbacks in *Blue Black Permanent* depict Barbara's mother Greta, an aspiring poet, cultivating a meditative connection with water and the Orkney landscape. These flashbacks are replete with images that reflexively invite the spectator to investigate the problem of rendering a poet's consciousness of place and environment through image and sound rather than words. This concern with the thresholds of language and medium is of enduring interest for Tait, for whom, as Penny Thomson observes, there is 'only a mechanical difference between paintbrush, typewriter and sixteen millimetre camera'.[6]

As Tait's first and only feature-length film, *Blue Black Permanent* provides a large canvas for her ongoing concern with the relation

6 Penny Thomson, quoted in Jan Moir, 'Public lives: first person highly singular', *The Guardian*, 31 March 1993, p. 8.

between word and image, and between poetry and film – not least because the cast of characters in the film includes a poet, a painter and a photographer. Greta describes herself as needing her domestic life as a mother as well as her creative life as a poet. However, the flashbacks to Greta's past emanate from the present of her grownup daughter Barbara, and as the narrative develops these become more than the sum of a daughter's memories in serving to reconstruct the life of a mother before she ended it by walking into the sea. Greta becomes a subject within a restored as well as a remembered past. This is illustrated by Greta's reaction to being outside in a heavy rainstorm in a state of reverie that she endeavours to convert into written words. She describes her situation to her painter friend Andrew as being 'torn between languages'. Moreover, Tait's tendency to cut away from the speaker to the artefacts and materials of expression, such as the trace of watered-down paint splashed above a sink, the paintings mounted on a wall, or the books and objects that line a shelf, further underlines her concern with expressive form and its materiality. None of Greta's poetry is quoted, rather it is the sources of poetic expression that the film endeavours to make visible. She describes her dreams and sleep as being 'like the sea', and this functions as a recurring image as Tait strives to give visible expression to the connection between inner consciousness and outward expression – a process Greta articulates as wrestling with available language as she struggles to make words out of sensory experience and subconscious images.

Greta's need for domestic life to anchor her is demonstrated when she returns to see her father in Orkney and revisits the location of her childhood. This journey home also represents a return to the place where her own mother, Barbara's grandmother, was swept into the sea and drowned – a tragic scenario that Greta is fated to repeat. Greta is not necessarily killed by domesticity, what apparently ends her life is a consequence of her subjective desire to reconcile her creative life and her domestic life. The extended sequence of shots of the Orkney coastline and sea that ends *Blue Black Permanent* suggests that what remains is the relative *permanence* of creative endeavour. Greta leaves behind the poetry that was formed out of her response to her natural surroundings. The cost of expressing inner experience is the unconscious reproduction of the death drive that saw Greta's mother take her own life. The balance that she desired between expressing herself through writing and her domestic life ultimately eludes her. Barbara's investigation of her mother's past meets the present when she consciously makes a statement that arrests the impending repetition of history. After a dream of her own she declares: 'I know now, I know what it is, it's not just finding an identity, not that, forget I'm my mother's daughter, I'm me, me.' Through the act of remembering, Barbara does not resolve the narrative question of why her mother took her life but she does assert the necessity of relinquishing the past rather than mourning its loss, in order to realize her own identity in the present.

Stella Does Tricks concerns the experience of a young London prostitute whose past is located in Glasgow where she was raised by her father Francis and aunt Aileen. Stella's father, a standup comedian, had promised her that he would become famous and they would go to London together. Instead this dream remains unfulfilled. Moreover, it is revealed that Francis sexually abused Stella as a child, something she clearly considers responsible for her present predicament. Her relationship with Francis is depicted as complex and ambivalent: in addition to being abusive he is also loving, and nurtures Stella's own capacity for fantasy. Stella's memories have more than one function, with her inner life involving a combination of remembering, fantasy and dream. She uses her past to suggest a possible means of escaping her present – her pimp describes this as 'going away in her head' during her encounters with clients. But Stella also modifies the past through her imagination, she fuses past and present when she imagines introducing her clients to her Dad and the moralistic and frigid Aileen. She also imagines a harrowing scene in which her Dad, in his role as a comedian, addresses a Catholic congregation through making jokes about his daughter's rape. In *Stella Does Tricks* the past is summoned and imagined as a means to hold it to account and suggest a more positive future. It is both a refuge from the reality of the present and a cause of her present situation. Stella's desire to hold her past and its consequences to account becomes a quest when she returns to its source in Glasgow. Indeed, the most positive moments of the film show Stella leaving her pimp and heading to Glasgow to enact her revenge on Francis and Aileen before returning to London with the desire to change her life. Douglas Gifford describes the typical protagonist of A.L. Kennedy's writing as 'a traumatised mind using displacement and fantastic imagination to simultaneously avoid and redeem the damage from which it hides'.[7] The difference in *Stella Does Tricks* is that Kennedy's ability as a writer to combine the imagining of psychological thresholds is balanced by the director's commitment to making explicit reference to the reality of women's experience.[8] Stella's subjectivity does, as Charlotte Brunsdon suggests, represent a departure from 'the tradition of naturalist representation of the prostitute as victim'.[9] Ultimately, however, Stella is unable to hide, she is unable to get away. Even after she has avenged her past abuse, she continues to find herself in a cycle of circumstances that lead to further abuse by men as her partner uses her to feed his drug habit.

Having endeavoured to show Stella's inner experience of, and attempt to overcome, her past, the film reaches the expressive limits of her subjectivity in the ambiguous final scene. Stella is shown addressing an unseen audience from a stage, recounting in the manner of standup her own experiences at the hands of men. She ends her confessional/performance with a metacommentary on the artifice that separates reality from fictional storytelling: 'I'm lying – it's a story, but that's why I'm here, to tell you stories. So picture this scene.' This is followed by a cut to a blank screen that carries a caption that highlights the truth claim of the

7 Douglas Gifford, 'Contemporary fiction II: seven writers in Scotland', in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 620.

8 Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 71.

9 Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Not having it all: women and film in the 1990s', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 1990s* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 172.

documentary research that motivated the making of the fictional film: 'With thanks to the girls we met in Glasgow, Manchester and London whose lives inspired the making of this film'. The accompanying first-person words of the closing song, 'All of this is mine' by Polly Harvey, serve to locate Stella as a representative of real women like the protagonist portrayed in the film. But Stella's subjective imagining of her past is effectively used up by the film, and having reached this point there is no future that can be imagined for Stella – unlike Barbara in *Blue Black Permanent* who manages to arrest the recurrence of the past and release herself from it. Stella has nowhere to go other than to a premature death by suicide as she imagines being encouraged to take an overdose of pills by her father and aunt. The scene serves as a precis of the film and underlines the material artifice between dreams, stories and reality.

The assessment of *Blue Black Permanent* and *Stella Does Tricks* as films which exemplify the Scottish imagination described by Watson and Scullion inevitably raises the question of the expressive possibilities and limitations of film as a language. The unconscious processes that occupy the protagonists of these two films result in a gendered mode of subjective expression that foregrounds the materiality of film and the transition between the language of words and the film image. The use of the image in these films remains primarily veridical but articulates the unconscious and metaphysical imaginings of the protagonists. The act of summoning the past in both films is expressive and affirmative rather than mournful and nostalgic, and brings with it an accompanying death drive with divergent consequences for the differently located protagonists. The psychological and metaphysical thresholds between parent and sibling, life and death, fantasy and reality are given a filmic materiality by the self-reflexive strategies of each film. While the locations of Orkney and the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and London are key to these imaginings, both films ultimately suggest that thresholds are psychologically manifest as a state of mind rather than a physical or topographical feature – as Powrie suggests of the rite of passage film.[10] Stella's rite of passage cannot be assumed to proceed from childhood to adulthood but rather from a deprived childhood into a life of recurring struggles for self-determination, while Barbara's passage contains a similar need to rebut what might be passed on to her as an adult. In each case the passage is a transitory state where the threshold between the continuity of life and the finality of death through suicide is negotiated by the protagonists. The imagining of these movements occurs as a consequence of Scottish settings, and viewed together *Blue Black Permanent* and *Stella Does Tricks* can be positioned as points of departure from the tradition of realism that defines so much of British cinema and critical approaches to its objects. They also challenge the overtly masculine focus of many Scottish films.

10 Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present', pp. 320, 322.

Scotland, heritage and devolving British cinema

SARAH NEELY

In his introduction to the groundbreaking 1986 edited collection *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema*, Charles Barr used the term 'heritage' in relation to a body of films from the 1940s. For Barr, this particular category stemmed from a long-held tradition of British cinema's reliance on the literary in order to 'exploit ... heritage in seeking out prestige material with export potential'.[1] A few years later, in an edited collection on Thatcherism and cinema in Britain, Andrew Higson adopted Barr's term as a foundation on which to formulate a bona fide genre.[2] Since then, the term 'heritage cinema' has gained a certain currency within both circles of criticism and production in Britain. Higson's initial definition of heritage cinema was informed by developments in the wider heritage industry of the 1980s, characterized by a commodification of the past within which the National Trust's promotion of stately homes could be linked to the aesthetic strategies and pleasures offered by films such as *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), *Another Country* (Marek Kanievska, 1984), *A Room With a View* (James Ivory, 1986) and *A Handful of Dust* (Charles Sturridge, 1987). Underscoring Higson's analysis of heritage cinema was a general criticism of its exclusive representation of a privileged group within British society, a nostalgic past that contrasted starkly with a contemporary Britain marked by high unemployment and social division.

But while the group of films designated as 'heritage' may have been criticized for their representation of Britain, the conception of heritage itself quickly became fixed as a key critical category in

1 Charles Barr, 'Introduction: amnesia and schizophrenia', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), p. 11.

2 Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pp. 109–29.

3   Belén Vidal, review of Andrew
    Higson, *English Heritage, English
    Cinema: Costume Drama Since
    1980*, Screen, vol. 43, no. 3 (2003),
    p. 351.
4   Claire Monk, 'Sexuality and
    heritage', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 5,
    no. 10 (1995), pp. 32–4.
5   Andrew Higson, *English Heritage,
    English Cinema: Costume Drama
    Since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford
    University Press, 2003). Higson
    also offered a detailed response
    to various debates surrounding his
    notion of heritage in his earlier
    article 'The Heritage film and
    British cinema', in Andrew Higson
    (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key
    Writings on British Cinema*
    (New York, NY and London:
    Cassell, 1996), pp. 232–49.
6   Higson, *English Heritage, English
    Cinema*, p. 25.
7   Ibid., p. 260.
8   Cairns Craig, 'Rooms without a
    view', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 1, no.
    2 (June 1991), p. 10.
9   Higson, *English Heritage, English
    Cinema*, p. 4.
10 See, for example, Richard Dyer's
    'Heritage cinema in Europe', in
    Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *The
    Encyclopedia of European Cinema*
    (London: British Film Institute and
    Cassell, 1995), pp. 204–5. More
    recently, Belén Vidal has also
    revisited heritage debates,
    opening up the conception and
    forging connections with other
    'national' cinemas through a
    critical reframing of what she calls
    the 'literary film'. See Belén Vidal
    Villasur, 'Classic adaptations,
    modern reinventions: reading the
    image in contemporary literary
    film', *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2002),
    pp. 5–18. Ruth Barton and John
    Hill have both examined Irish
    cinema in relation to the heritage
    framework and debates. See Ruth
    Barton, *Irish National Cinema*
    (New York, NY and London:
    Routledge, 2004); John Hill, '"The
    past is always there in the
    present"', in J. MacKillop (ed.),
    *Contemporary Irish Cinema: From
    The Quiet Man to Dancing at
    Lughnasa* (New York, NY:
    Syracuse University Press, 1999),
    pp. 29–39.

British cinema studies. Moreover, the concept survived its close association with Thatcherism. As Belén Vidal explains, 'the Thatcherite connection had long passed its sell-by date, but the heritage label had taken root in British film studies to the extent of being adopted as reference point even by its critics'.[3] Vidal is referring in particular here to Claire Monk's formulation of a group of films such as *Carrington* (Christopher Hampton, 1995) and *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1995) as 'post-heritage'.[4] Higson has himself responded to the shifting critical terrain in his recent book, *English Heritage, English Cinema*.[5] The most notable shift in Higson's conceptual approach to heritage cinema is the acknowledgment of transnational filmmaking practices within the genre. While the majority of heritage films focus on aspects of 'Englishness', Higson admits the paradox of such a framework, given the cosmopolitan crosscurrents affecting the body of films that he focuses on. The central role of the American James Ivory and Indian Ismail Merchant in the British heritage genre is just one obvious example of such transnational phenomena.

As with all genre studies, one of the potential weaknesses of the heritage framework has been a certain blindness to difference and variance from the 'ideal' construction of the genre. This has resulted in a critical conception unaltered by significant developments in the kinds of films that have been consigned to the category. This is recognized in part by Higson's attempts at a greater precision in centring his analysis on 'English' rather than 'British' representations. His new study remaps the genre in accordance with the recent body of transnational 'heritage' films, all of which, to varying degrees, engage with an English past, while constituting a national 'brand' that has to address an international market.[6] Consequently, the new cycle of heritage Higson identifies as 'crossover' films refers more to the industry's transatlantic crossing than to any domestic borders.[7] Such loosening of generic definitions may seem a positive move away from the thorny and limiting perspective of the national, but the promise of new frameworks does not entirely relieve the tension that exists over the basic conceptions of heritage beyond the packaging of Englishness for global consumption. This is not without its ironies, however. Cairns Craig, for example, has described the paradox whereby 'an international market place ... diminishes the significance of Englishness ... [while] at the same time seeking to compensate by asserting "traditional" English values, whether Victorian or provincial'.[8]

Despite his focus on projections of Englishness, Higson himself acknowledges the need for a study of 'heritage' offerings from Ireland, Scotland and Wales.[9] Elsewhere there has been a notable impetus towards opening up these conceptions of heritage to include European heritage cinema.[10] The debate around heritage has also been extended by other critics arguing the necessity for loosening generic definitions to

11 Sheldon Hall, 'The wrong sort of cinema: refashioning the heritage film debate', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), pp. 191–9.

12 Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 1.

13 At the 1996 BAFTAs, *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995), *The Madness of King George* (Nicholas Hytner, 1995), *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995) and *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) all won awards. Awards for television highlighted the success of two period dramas – *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995) and *Persuasion* (Roger Michel, 1995).

14 Liz Lochhead, 'The shadow', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 5, no. 6 (1995), p. 15.

15 Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 27.

include 'sub categories'.[11] But what I want to consider here is the relationship between heritage and the emergence of a distinct Scottish cinema. It is fair to say that such debates have rarely crossed borders into studies of Scottish cinema. Indeed, certain high-profile strands of contemporary filmmaking in Scotland are more frequently posited as offering a productive counterpoint to the dominance of heritage in British cinema. For instance, Duncan Petrie describes the arrival of *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) and *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994) as a 'timely riposte to the British cinema's over-reliance on tasteful period films, many adapted from the "English" literary canon'.[12] The majority of criticism of the genre may have focused on its limited representation of the privileged classes, but heritage also provided a benchmark whereby Scottish cinema (and others) could clearly define itself by what it was not – a sort of Celtic othering. That this is the case is hardly surprising considering that heritage's links to Thatcherite Britain were forged around the same time that Scotland's creative sectors were experiencing a boom in cultural activity in the wake of the failed 1979 devolution referendum, a time when the importance of representation and a distinct Scottish national identity came to the fore. Writing in 1995, a successful year for heritage films,[13] Scots poet and playwright Liz Lochhead expressed admiration for the recently released Hollywood-financed period film *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton Jones, 1995) by contrasting it tellingly with the heritage film *The Madness of King George* (Nicholas Hyntner, 1994): 'One, I'm afraid, very much a British Film, the other a Scottish American movie'.[14]

But *Rob Roy* is also open to analysis in relation to the categories of heritage cinema. And following Higson's notion of heritage, a wealth of films with Scotland as their subject matter present themselves. Petrie also questions Higson's omission of Scotland from the heritage debate, pointing to the definition of the heritage film as focused around 'the reproduction of literary texts, artifacts and landscapes which already have a privileged status within the accepted definition of national heritage ... [and] the reconstruction of a historical moment which is assumed to be of national significance'.[15] Petrie argues that this could apply to various adaptations and films engaging with the same images that have provided the face of Scotland's heritage industry. Such a study would include several versions of *Macbeth*, the two versions of *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (C.C. Calvert, 1923 and Alexander Korda, 1948), as well as numerous adaptations of Robert Louis Stevenson or Sir Walter Scott, including four cinema versions of *Kidnapped* (1917, 1938, 1959, 1971) and three of *Rob Roy* (1923, 1953, 1995). Also made in the same year as Caton-Jones's version of *Rob Roy*, and featuring a similar outlaw hero, is Mel Gibson's Oscar-winning *Braveheart* (1995). At the other end of the production scale, Cromwell Productions, a small company that has generally produced historical documentaries, has also made several low-budget, feature-length films, including *The Bruce* (Bob Caruthers and David McWhinnie, 1996) a biopic of the

16 Petrie refers to recent trends in filmmaking in Scotland as representative of a devolved British Cinema in *Screening Scotland*, p. 186.

17 Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 85.
18 Similar connections could be made to films like *I Know Where I'm Going!* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1937), *Regeneration* (Gillies Mackinnon, 1997) or *Monarch of the Glen*, where a journey from England to Scotland entails a return to either one's roots or a general place of refuge.

19 Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 210.

victor of Bannockburn, and a film dealing with the Jacobite rebellion, *Chasing the Deer* (Graham Holloway, 1995). Other historical or costume dramas focusing on Scotland have included *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997) and *Regeneration* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1997). Ecosse Films, the company responsible for *Mrs Brown*, has also produced the extremely successful BBC series *Monarch of the Glen*, based on the novels by Compton McKenzie, which has secured a large fan base both at home and abroad and lead to a boom in tourism in the area in which it is filmed.

If we are dealing with what Petrie has termed a 'devolved' British cinema,[16] does the need to address notions of Scottish heritage have the same urgency? A brief consideration of a film like *Mrs Brown* reveals that the concerns of the 'Scottish' heritage film may not be all that far apart from those more traditionally associated with the category in its British or English formulations. Charting the relationship between Queen Victoria and her Scottish servant, *Mrs Brown*, like many of the early heritage films, is structured as journey to a 'foreign' place that leads to self-discovery and an exploration of issues of class and gender. Similar to the escapades of the English in Italy depicted in *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1985), where, as Julianne Pidduck writes, 'tourism . . . [is] bound up with a quest for an authentic pre-industrial environment unsullied by modernity',[17] the Queen's journey to Scotland, although partly symbolic of her recovery following the death of her husband, reflects a general retreat from the weight of privilege and duty.[18] Throughout the crosscultural narrative, the robust, direct and masculine Scottishness of John Brown (as played by Billy Connolly) and the rugged images of the Scottish landscape serve in contrast to an England marked by genteel restraint and repression that is characteristic of conventional heritage representations. The opening voiceover assures us that 'all Highlanders are good for the health', and an exchange over John Brown's tendency to speak his mind informs us of the cultural differences at hand: to 'speak as you feel' is Scottish – 'down South you don't'. The Queen (Judi Dench), like the female protagonists in other heritage travel narratives, serves as a bridge between cultures. Issues of class and the power relations are played out through structures of sexual desire and a conflation of gender and ethnic difference. Indeed, similar dichotomies are laid out in *Rob Roy*, but also in *Braveheart* where 'the rugged masculinity of the Scottish heroes is contrasted by the effeminacy of certain male English characters'.[19] It is interesting that although these projections of masculinity are reminiscent of the articulations of colonial power in the Raj revival films, England figures in a dramatically different fashion in the Scottish narratives.

Ultimately, however, a consideration of Scottish cinema in relation to heritage is blocked from two different directions. In studies of British cinema, considerations of Scottish heritage are overshadowed by the considerable body of texts mediating an English past. In studies of Scottish cinema, just as heritage has been defined primarily by 'its

20 Claire Monk, 'The British heritage-film debate revisited', in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 180.

21 Jill Forbes and Sarah Street, *European Cinema: an Introduction* (New York, NY and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 41.

22 Pidduck provides an evocative exploration of the costume drama as a microcosm in *Contemporary Costume Film*.

23 Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, p. 5.

24 Martin Wroe, 'Hard drugs and heroine addiction', *The Observer*, 10 March 1996, p. 13. Cited in Derek Paget, 'Speaking out: the transformations of Trainspotting', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds), *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 128. John Caughie and Kevin Rockett also refer to this moment in the introduction to their *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. ix.

consistent export – and especially North American',[20] there has often been a tendency to promote Scottish films as distinct from English ones – either by aligning the Scottish output with European art cinema, or with Hollywood cinema. Whether or not we take Britain or Hollywood as a reference point of cultural colonization, both invoke a necessity for a sort of 'double address' – a mode which must speak to both the domestic and the foreign.[21] This pull is evident in *Mrs Brown*, a film that provides a 'microcosm'[22] of the debates around Scottish heritage previously touched on in this essay. It plays out the conflict between tasteful restraint and gallus romantic abandon as described by Lochhead. *Mrs Brown* also self consciously plays out the popularly consumed myths of Scottish and English identities and conflicts (through the English 'tourist' narrative of the picturesque Deeside locations), allowing for further reflection on contemporary anxieties and tensions between identity as it is projected and perceived, both inside and outside Scotland.

Mrs Brown was originally made for television and then bought by the US Mini-Major Miramax, a company which had already been involved with other heritage films such as *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996), *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996) and *The Wings of the Dove* (Ian Softley, 1997). As Higson points out, the development of 'niche' markets and the role of the specialized US distributors has had a notable impact on filmmaking in Britain. The success of the heritage genre has rested on its successful export, a fact that has meant the films function as 'cultural ambassadors'.[23] While the projection of national identity to global audiences and its relationship to tourist and heritage industries should be a key issue of consideration, it is also important to examine the representations themselves alongside their critical and commercial reception. This is the value of the heritage framework: its ability to address both this commercial relationship but also a more cultural one.

In February 1996, the simultaneous UK release of *Trainspotting* and *Sense and Sensibility* provoked debate in the British press around an unlikely comparison. The films were seen to diverge both in terms of representation ('smackheads' of the north versus the 'bonnet-heads' of middle England) as well as audiences ('Trainspotters' and 'Janespotters').[24] It seemed that Britain was divided into two cinematic groups. Yet while *Trainspotting* did not clearly ally itself with tourist industries, and was not the sort of 'cultural ambassador' that heritage assumes, several other films and television dramas set in Scotland (*Rob Roy, Mrs Brown, Monarch of the Glen*) have fulfilled these criteria. At the same time, the limited ways in which heritage has operated as a critical category has discouraged the detailed consideration of a distinct Scottish version of the genre. While such critical frameworks are useful, I would suggest that a more open approach is necessary in order to respond to the range of complexities presented by contemporary filmmaking in Scotland.

dossier

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The sins of commission II

ROD STONEMAN

*A personal trajectory continued, in which transposition from a radical
television company to a national film agency takes place – new
policies are proposed but compromise is assumed – new Irish
filmmaking develops – the contemporary predicament of English-
language cinema in Europe is witnessed – persistent marketing
of dominant American product changes taste and reduces
space for cultural diversity – the general condition of
progressive film deteriorates but prospects for continued marginal
activity endure.*

report

Provenance: repetition compulsion

It is necessary to wish something very different, and above all to
believe . . . that for every situation there exists one way out and the
possibility of finding it. Or in other words truth exists, absolute in its
relativity.[1]

In a sense, this essay returns to the format of a previous analytical and
confessional undertaking in these pages, 'Sins of commission', written in
1992 after ten years working as part of the Independent Film and Video
Department at Channel Four.[2]

Apart from trying to analyze the opening of a new space for
independent film within a new type of television station, the article also
represented an initial rumination about the possibility of radical
intervention in the complex and overdetermined media structures
operating at that time. The context of *Screen*, with its virile rationality
and intimidating intellectualism, and its occasional attention to

1 Franco Fortini, quoted in the
English translation of the script for
Fortini/Cani (Jean Marie Straub
and Danièle Huillet, 1976), *Screen*,
vol. 19, no. 2 (1978), pp. 11–40.

2 Rod Stoneman, 'Sins of
commission', *Screen*, vol. 33 no. 2
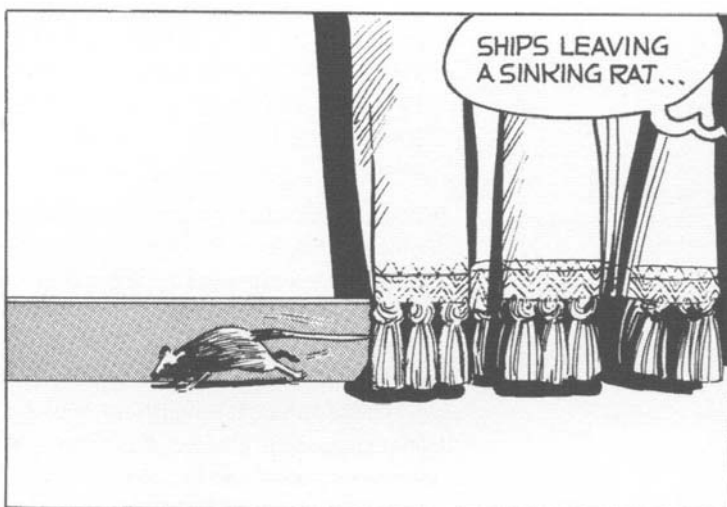(1992), pp. 127–44.

3   In the immortal, albeit apocryphal, words of Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Tse Tung: 'Sex is good, but power is better'.
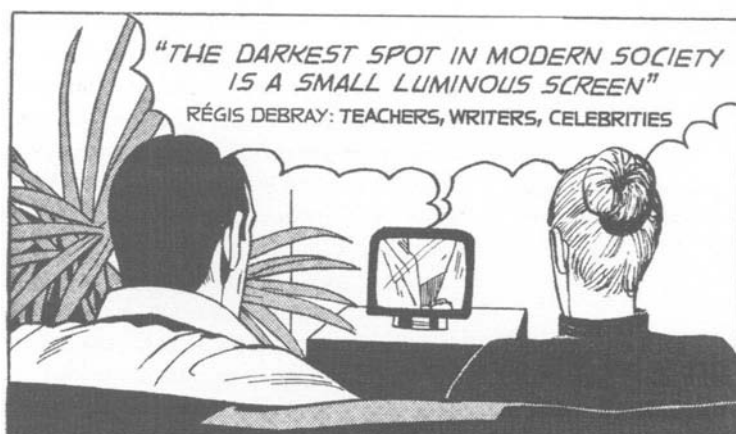
4   Stoneman, 'Sins of commission', p. 128.

independent film, was the relevant place to talk of that micro-conjuncture in British television. I tried to sketch my sense of the specificity of individual experience in relation to that part of us that is lived in history. Both the 1992 essay and this revisitation take a particular and peculiar form in order to grapple with the strange experience of carrying a version of the *Screen*iste critique through positions of power[3] within the institutions of broadcasting and film. It is never easy to live one thing and think another.[4]

In the intervening decade I found myself moving from a television station to a national film agency – a transfer from television commissioning within an innovative public service broadcaster in England to a semi-state structure in Ireland, the Irish Film Board. However, the tasks of arranging the disposition of monies to independent filmmakers and acting as midwife to bring forth a range of new filmmaking have, in my experience, a great deal in common.

The original 'Sins of commission' was written at a point when it had just been revealed that the executive directors of the Channel Four company had seen fit to award themselves substantial individual financial bonuses. From inside the company it felt like the channel was crossing a threshold, abandoning its founding ideals and moving towards a new and more venal corporate culture. Of course it is always too easy to denounce such things from afar – I was implicated in the project of the channel and many of its subtle shifts and compromises, but at the time it did feel like a significant change to a more commercial paradigm. Now, ten years later, even a cursory glance at the state of Channel Four makes it all too clear that its original aims and aspirations were being abandoned. This station,

All illustrations 'by, with or from Norma Doesn't'. Lettering by Ide Deloughry.

"THE DARKEST SPOT IN MODERN SOCIETY IS A SMALL LUMINOUS SCREEN"
RÉGIS DEBRAY: TEACHERS, WRITERS, CELEBRITIES

and public service television more generally,[5] has descended into what Saul Bellow referred to as a 'moronic inferno'.[6] The prominence of specious programmes like *Big Brother* and *Graham Norton* and imported series like *Desperate Housewives* are not the point – it is the lack of a mixed menu and the limited range of programmes overall; there is insufficient diversity for it to be recognizable as any version of the original conception of Channel Four. A facetious remark I made at my leaving party about 'ships leaving a sinking rat' has proved to be prescient.

More recently the misconceived policies that led to the entirely predictable collapse of Film Four provided another symptom of the same corporate malaise. The shift of focus towards 'let's make fewer films but bigger ones', producing films to address the transatlantic market, was a dangerous policy in its own commercial terms and disastrous from a strategic and cultural perspective. Even Hollywood, at least at the moment of *Easy Rider* in the 1970s, has understood the benefit of doing a larger number of smaller films, most of which would be certain to fail commercially, but with those that succeeded returning enough financially to cover the rest. This model is, in my view, the only basis for any non-industrial version of cinema to play to its strengths, maintain its authenticity and integrity, and in the longer term to reinvent itself.[7]

'World cinema – that's the past', the Head of the Channel Four Factual Department was heard to exclaim as the late-night *Cinema from Three Continents* slot, commissioned by our section to present feature films from Africa, Asia and Latin America, was carelessly eliminated. A cursory glance at contemporary television programming indicates that access to a broad range of foreign-language films is not at all present, even at the periphery of the schedules; and this at a time when understanding other cultures, other politics has never been more urgent in the life of the world. O tempora! O mores!

5 I had a direct encounter with this process in another domain while making *Italy: the Image Business*, a programme in Large Door's *Visions Cinema* series for Channel Four in 1984. At that point Italian Television had reached a crucial juncture, with the private stations overtaking the three RAI stations and achieving more than fifty per cent of the audience. This was another specific incidence of the same crisis in confidence in a public service television that had failed to renew itself and outflank the belligerent challenge from commercial interests. The initial phase of Channel Four, deploying faster, more colourful and imaginative programming, was precisely the example that a brave and eclectic mixture was not incompatible with winning audiences.

6 *The Moronic Inferno* is a book title that Martin Amis took from Saul Bellow, who took the phrase from Wyndham Lewis.

7 Rod Stoneman, 'Under the shadow of Hollywood: the industrial versus the artisanal', *The Irish Review*, no. 24 (Autumn 1999); *Kinema* (Spring 2000). URL: http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/stonm001.htm.

report

8 Margaret Dickinson, *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

9 'To be attacked by the enemy is a good thing and not a bad thing'. Mao Tse Tung.

10 I remember specifically Jeremy Isaacs and John Willis, controller of programmes, offering encouragement, and Michael Grade welcoming the internal critique. Isaacs's advice was 'Suaviter in modo fortiter in re' (Soft in approach, resolute in deed).

11 It is worth stressing that the use of the plural 'our' in relation to the Board's work is not a token one – there has been a considerable, continuous, collaborative input from colleagues, filmmakers and fellow travellers working through every level of the endeavour. Institutionally, I would also stress the directive role of the individual members of the Board itself and the crucial input of the four very different chairs – Lelia Doolan 1993–96, Louis Marcus 1997–99, Ann O'Connell 1999, Ossie Kilkenny 2000–05 – and colleagues on the staff of the Board over this period.

report

When, in 1999, Margaret Dickinson reprinted my article in *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90*,[8] she described it somewhat reproachfully in her introduction as a 'thoughtful and ambivalent reflection … that seems to support a thoroughly orthodox view of broadcasting'. Strategies intended to inflect new conditions within the given terrain end up being attacked not only from the right[9] but also from the left, on the basis that they are indeed not thoroughgoing or radical enough. That any cultural intervention or incision is open to critique from such polar perspectives invokes the inevitable structural discomfort of tactical tensions seen from opposed positions. But this particular argument has to be viewed in perspective and in relation to the extent to which the aspiration for radical filmmaking (indeed, by now, for most kinds of non-US film and television) to reach a wider audience has, with the privilege of hindsight, proved to be more difficult to sustain than anticipated. Aspirations to establish any kind of eventual hegemony for progressive work seem very far distant indeed.

There was some response to the original 'Sins of commission' article from independent producers and television apparachiks,[10] although the true 'reply' was the silence that emanated both from *Screen's* increasingly academic catchment and the continuing disjunction in Britain between media practitioners and any kind of analytical/ theoretical perspectives. Old notions of integral interaction between theory and practice are long gone.

Pausing again to try to understand the current conjuncture, there are some significant differences in attempting another evaluation after ten years at Bord Scannán na hÉireann (the Irish Film Board) – a European national film agency. In my mind, at least, there is some continuity and connection with the Project of independent film as formulated by the Independent Filmmakers' Association, articulated in this journal in the 1970s and inflected by the practice of the Independent Film and Video Department at Channel Four in the 1980s. Although there are inevitably shifts both from television to cinema and to a disparate national context (a postcolonial context with complex circumstances of its own), there are further subtle ramifications arising from a move from the metropolis to live in Galway with the cultural intensity of the west coast of Ireland.

Film in Ireland: the conditions of engagement

Although it is sometimes difficult to extricate clear strategies and plans from the disruptions of the contingent and their lubrication by the ironies of the everyday, the desire to drive a progressive perspective through underlying structures, themselves in constant movement, persisted. Our[11] approach redeployed the talents of the nascent independent sector in Ireland in relation to the needs of the audience, the perceptions of the state and a renegotiation of market conditions at that time.

The specific history of the evolution of film in Ireland includes the setting up of the first Film Board in 1982 and its closure in a fit of

monetarist parsimony by the then prime minister Charles Haughey, not a paradigm of fiscal rectitude himself, in 1987. The first Film Board had made ten feature films, many of them, such as *Angel* (Neil Jordan, 1982), *Ann Devlin* (Pat Murphy, 1984), *Reefer and the Model* (Joe Comerford, 1988) and *Eat the Peach* (Peter Ormrod, 1986), considerable achievements. Significant films were also produced in the 'dark years' which followed – *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989) and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) for example – but without the support of a national film agency. The absence of an agency meant that the independent sector in Ireland was badly impeded, but lobbying continued from the film community alongside strategic arguments from the Coopers and Lybrand Report, principally drafted by Ann O'Connell in 1992, which bore fruit in the civil service and government structures; eventually leading to the adoption of new policies. Bord Scannán na hÉireann was reconstituted on 4 April 1993 with Lelia Doolan as executive chair, and I was appointed chief executive in August of that year.

The new Board was set up at a time when Ireland was itself in a period of extremely rapid economic and social transformation. With unparalleled speed the country ingested the reverberations of economic flux, the complex and wide-ranging effects of a belated ideological secularization, changing gender relations, and decisive shifts in the armed conflict in Northern Ireland. Although, perhaps, the political and climatic movements cannot be fully grasped even, or especially, by those who are within them, it can be asserted that one of the crucial and determining contexts of new Irish cinema has been the dynamic of rapid social and cultural change.

An unparalleled opportunity for advanced cultural politics presented itself – the architecture of the Board's novel policies could be sketched anew, on something like a blank sheet of paper – its reconstitution after such a long period of closure enabled a break with the approach of the national film agencies of previous epochs. In the 1970s and 1980s, those agencies, often housed within national film institutes, espoused cultural aims to be delivered by an unreconstructed auteurism, within an uncritical notion of national cinema. This did not seem viable in the current epoch. The new conjuncture of the 1990s necessitated a more complex and adept negotiation with audience expectations: requiring the reshaping of auteurist visions in relation to the very powerful forces of the market and the complex financial machinery that underlies contemporary cinema processes. We set out to construct a practice of filmmaking that came from, and spoke to, its own national imaginary with authenticity and integrity, whilst also navigating the implications of international finance from a market dominated by doxa from elsewhere.

This cultural project combined in a new way with an economic imperative – to create activities with significant economic and employment outcomes which would also support cultural effects. The timing involved the fortuitous release of underlying expressive energies

during a phase of rapid prosperity. The speed of social change led to a configuration of subject matters and creative preoccupations that had some urgency and freshness.

In Ireland the structural questions of scale immediately came into focus – here advantages of interconnectedness coexist with the limitations of a small nation-state. Definable benefits sit alongside specific disadvantages arising from the attempt to generate sustainable levels of film activity in a country of about three-and-a-half million (or an island of five million, depending on how one draws the boundaries).

Although European filmmakers tend not to be driven primarily by market motives, the Board set out to encourage them to 'think of an audience' at all stages of the production process; this seems crucial and healthy for an activity that draws upon relatively large amounts of money for even the lowest budget film. Of course this approach is not the same as a fully commercial orientation, although it is liable to be mistaken for such. In fact thinking of the audience might also be an integral part of the concept of the socially motivated artist. Some relation with audience interactivity was predicated in the historical British independent work of the 1970s.[12] The conception of reception is part of a necessary process to take creativity away from the solipsistic ideology of self-expression. This perspective also leads to a new framework for the placement of the 'auteur' and reader in relation to the text. How meaning is made is a precision calculation for all constructive creative decisions. What meanings are socially available in each sequence of images and sounds? Which interpretations are likely to dominate? What is the political context of the representation and of its reception?

Dealing with the problems of solipsism is a constant issue, accurately satirized in Anthony Burgess's fictional poet Enderby. Having been scalded by prunes at birth, he uses the significant phrase 'death, terrible as prunes' in his poetry, assuming that this fruit has the same dreadful resonance for everyone. Thinking social meanings and audience positioning through at an early stage is also the basis for a necessary clarity before the filmmaker enters the field of contention arising from naked market pressures that intervene with, say, casting issues or script changes. For example the notorious Miramax wanted to change the word 'poteen' to 'moonshine' in the dialogue of *Last of the High Kings* by David Keating, and also to insert inappropriate cast into Gerry Stembridge's *About Adam*.

This relation with reception led to the encouragement of a 'market-responsive auteur', an oxymoronic formulation which managed to confound both those who wished to recreate the Board as an economistic, semi-automatic fund, shaped by commercialist ideology, and those who would have preferred an anachronistic reincarnation of the purely cultural agency funding 'artists'. This was consistent with other deliberate discursive manoeuvres which we adopted – for example the Film Board would provide filmmakers with 'loans' and not 'grants', a small change in transaction nomination but one that tried to signify a

13 In fact my mis-memory of the original quotation and a desire for even greater diversity served to have multiplied Mao's mathematics by ten.

move away from the soft and addictive subsidy mentality which has often reduced European independent producers to 'homo applicans'. I talked of achieving a 'judicious equilibrium' between culture and commerce (a facile and manichean dichotomy anyway). Of course it is difficult to argue with such an overtly reasonable approach; no one can object to the term 'balance' as it is such a irrefutably moderate word, and it was helpful to assert these positions from which to designate and dominate the discursive terrain.

'Radical pluralism' was the oft expressed aspiration – a founding concept taken from the school of early Channel Four, presented as a flag for the Board to sail under: the line 'Let a thousand flowers bloom and a thousand schools of thought contend'[13] was quoted in the preface to the Film Board's first annual *Review/Athbhreithniu 1993*. A senior civil servant in the Linneus tradition spotted the provenance and remarked wryly that 'this may well be the first time Mao Tse Tung has been referenced in the annual report of an Irish semi-state body'. Arguing for the diversity of the variegated elements of a national cinema was vital in order to keep a range of elements in play, including artisanal and 'personal' filmmaking. Even the deployment of the term 'filmmaker' is important precisely because it avoids the tiresome jockeying of the component elements of film production – producers vs directors vs writers – all competing for hegemony and above-the-title credits.

14 For discussion of the executive production role, see Stephen Lambert, *Channel Four Television with a Difference* (London: British Film Institute, 1982) p. 153.

Critical pragmatism was accompanied by a clear respect for the autonomy of the individual filmmaker, insisting on full involvement and detailed input as a funder, but relying on rational persuasion rather than forcing filmmakers to change their work.[14] There has been some slippage from this approach in the tendency in both television commissioners and public funders in national agencies to pose as interventionist commercial executive producers in recent years. This is neither ethical in professional terms nor effective in creative ones.

15 Irish Film Board, *Review/ Athbhreithniu 1993*.

16 Irish Film Board, *Review/ Athbhreithniu 2000*, Rod Stoneman, 'Icons of the imagination', in Kevin Rockett (ed.), *Ten Years After* (Galway: BSÉ, 2003).

As a Board we made polemical arguments like 'In all its forms film is at its most innovative when it is experienced as unexpected, challenging social norms and complacencies of taste, extending the boundaries of the possible ...',[15] and issued mission statements: 'We intend to encourage bravery and embrace creative risk. Paradoxically, in cinema, the further you push artistically the more genuinely commercial you can be.'[16] Uttering these 'neither/nor' verbalizations and myriad other oxymoronic policy formulations seemed the only way to absorb and deflect the implacable pressures of increasingly economistic discourses.

This should not be mistaken for the social market pragmatism of the British (New) Labour party in its avowed determination to 'take moderation to extremes'; rather, it was a conscious strategy to keep challenging and radical work as an integral part of the film production landscape, where it can remain an available choice and, given a situation where more congenial conditions prevail again, it can be strengthened and move 'in transit to another conception of the world', as Che Guevara

17 Che Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996) p. 26.

wrote in *Motorcycle Diaries*.[17] Maintaining the range of the creative

18 The loss of parts of the spectrum of specificity is irreversible, as Alpha Oumar Konare, a former President of Mali, put it: 'It's like standing in a burning library'.

gene pool in contemporary global conditions is vitally important at a time of aggressive reduction in the spectrum of filmmaking and a continued threat to cultural diversity.[18]

It was also necessary to modernize the national and indeed international perception of Irish cinema, as there was some persistence of the anachronistic image of indigenous films as arty and 'worthy', generally depicting historical and rural subjects and aimed at an art-house audience. In 1998 we commissioned a fast-cut, ninety-second cinema trailer about new Irish cinema to shift these residual perceptions and transmit a sharper sense that many of the new films were more urban, comic, violent, sexual. This was a part of a small-scale attempt to intercept and shift audience desire through our own direct marketing in the multiplexes. We utilized some of our meagre resources to negotiate the place where the audience had formed its expectations and then endeavoured to extend those desires towards contemporary Irish production. Inevitably the puny scale of this intervention meant that it would not inflect the formidable forces focused on the development of audience taste. The cost of making and distributing this trailer was a tiny fraction of the publicity budget deployed for any one of the many studio films released each week in Ireland.

When the Irish government reconstituted the Film Board in 1993, it was as part of a range of connected, concerted policies such as a revived tax incentive, encouraging RTÉ (the recalcitrant national broadcaster) to spend a proportion of its budget on independents, creating an Irish-language station, T na G (later TG4), with a new structure as a publisher broadcaster. These were carried through in short order by the then Minister of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins. Taken together these policies had a transformative effect – an immediate and sustained exponential growth in film production in Ireland with a local and international impact.

The organizational structure and resources of Bord Scannán na hÉireann grew continuously from three operatives and a capital budget of £1 million in 1993 to sixteen staff and €12 million in 2002, keeping the scale of its internal operation and infrastructure in proportion to the monies used to fund independent production: in general, ninety per cent of the Board's monies was provided for production and development.[19]

19 This is roughly the same ratio of monies as the early Channel Four deployed 'outside' to fund independents in relation to the resources spent 'inside' the infrastructure.

One key difference of the Irish enterprise in relation to European film activity on the continent arises from speaking the imperial tongue, that 'unsolicited gift of the English language', as Michael D. Higgins judiciously put it. On the one hand, English provides access to world markets but on the other, it facilitates a very high degree of penetration by US product at home.

Ireland, moving out from under the shadow of its nearby neighbour, positioned itself with closer alliances to the continent and strengthened relations across the Atlantic – and brought a sensible opportunism into play. One example of the continental connection would be our enthusiastic participation in Eurimages, a pan-European production fund

which was set up within the Council of Europe in 1989, with Ireland becoming a member in 1993. The Eurimages committee included twenty-six different countries in often feuding groupings, shifting and grinding like tectonic plates. Sadly, strong projects were sometimes caught in the geopolitical motivations of a dysfunctional board; but for a subscription of about €200,000 per year, Eurimages provided over €8 million for Irish films over the period. Britain withdrew from this international body in November 1995, an unfortunate and irrational gesture from the then Tory government. Whilst it is not always easy to maintain the general ideal of European integration in the face of the actual experience of its bizarre institutional and operational functioning, it does offer a wider continental context, encourage contact and networking between independents in different national sectors, and provide significant additional funding.

In the background at this time, immense amounts of money were percolating through the EU in the form of MEDIA funding in successive budget phases:

MEDIA I   January 1989–December 1995   €210 million
MEDIA II   January 1996–December 2000   €350 million
MEDIA+   January 2001–December 2005   €410 million

The culmulative total of €970 million in fifteen years provided for some useful activities and soft subsidy for European companies and individuals. The Irish sector, for instance, received €8 million for MEDIA II alone from this source.[20] Yet, so many years and so many euros later, it is clear that only a modest proportion of this money was focused and effective; smaller independents are hardly stronger and the decline of the fifty most financially important European companies,[21] including the collapse of Vivendi Universal, follows previous attempts to create a European studio. Perhaps the terrible epitaph on such formidable public expenditure is not that it decisively intervened to create the necessary resilience in the European film industry, but that it has managed slightly to slow an apparently inexorable decline.

There are many specificities of the Irish situation which have some resonance in other European territories, and one such is the need to guard against the side-effects of the service industry on indigenous filmmaking. Across time, despite the positive motives of encouraging incoming films (such as bringing finance to the industry, providing training opportunities), servicing foreign productions also debilitates and distracts companies from their own filmmaking. Through economic pressure it can lead to a dangerous diffusion of focus for small independent companies, a diversion from the precarious production cycle of making indigenous films. The mentality of servicing foreign films is not the same as that needed to initiate and drive veritable indigenous films into realization.

20 It is also true to say that it has been wrapped in weird and wasteful bureaucracy which encourages the weak habits of subsidy mentality.

21 Polygram and Studio Canal+, for example.

22 Alan Parker, 'Building a Sustainable UK Film Industry', a presentation to the UK film industry, 5 November 2002. URL: http://www.ukfilmcouncil. org.uk/filmindustry/building/.

23 Irish politics are not configured on a simple left–right spectrum but contain elements of a peculiar prism which still refracts the divisions of the civil war eighty years earlier.

24 However alliances are possible and there has been a continuously close and harmonious relationship with the Northern Ireland Film Commission run by Richard Taylor from 1994–2002 and Richard Williams after that, which focused cross-border strategies, encouraging the appropriate opportunism for both production sectors on the island of Ireland.

25 Irish Film Board, *Review/ Athbhreithniu 1993*.

In Ireland it has encouraged the formation of deal-driven producers without the full creative and editorial focus to interact with directors, writers and other central components of production. Alan Parker's pronouncements in late 2002[22] offered implausible arguments for new distribution emphases for the British structures; this is another version of the same problem and an imitative move towards the US industrial approach. There is also the longer-term strategic danger of a new, more rightwing regime[23] finding the appealing photo opportunities and financial figures of bigger-budget incoming films more attractive than those inconveniently argumentative little films of the local variety, which inevitably exhibit such an uneven commercial performance.

The pressure of antagonistic political and economic forces is unrelenting; yet it is necessary to negotiate some degree of market cognisance without the full-blown embrace of commercialized culture. Progressive elements of the sector do not speak with a coherent voice and each separate entity and organization is competitively positioned and promotes itself through what Freud might have designated 'the fetishism of small differences'. Different micro-organizations push forward and there are always ambitious individual subjects who 'hope for preferment', in Trollope's phrase. There were at least half a dozen individuals who perpetrated various levels of attempted putsch in the ten years of my tenure.[24]

Like any other autonomous semi-state structure, a national film agency must avoid being pulled into the vortex of party politics. There is always the danger of a new government preferring to 'do things differently' almost for its own sake. As the casual demise of British Screen and BFI Production and the creation of the *dirigiste* Film Council in the UK, or FCUK, illustrates all too clearly, the desire of any new governmental regime for change can have destructive side effects.

There are also specific cultural factors in a postcolonial country like Ireland. Apocryphally, when Micheal MacLiamoir (who was himself of English origin) was asked by Orson Welles how he would describe Irish culture, he apparently replied without hesitation and with the single word 'malice'. Both begrudgery and the general press tendency towards what is known as 'knocking copy' are manifest in many social formations, including those of the previous colonizer; however there may be factors of scale and history that inflect them in this case.

Any film-funding agency exacerbates external negativity with the heavy attrition rate of the selection process – the negative response to the vast majority of applications involves rejecting myriad highly-motivated and carefully nurtured proposals. The normal way of accounting for perceived rejection is to displace the problem outwards – the delusion of exclusion. Inevitably many filmmakers will have to say, with Jonathan Swift, 'I must complain the cards are ill-shuffled till I have a good hand'.[25] There are many sad international examples of increasingly experienced independents attacking their agencies as they

26 Scottish Screen has experienced vivid examples of this, having been publicly attacked by Bill Forsyth when his project was turned down in 1997 and at the centre of an aggressive kerfuffle about chief executive Steve MacIntyre's personal life in June 2003.

27 Jeremy Isaacs elegantly and ironically describes his attempt to convince William Whitelaw, the then Home Secretary, of the argument for 'repressive tolerance' over a lunch of gulls' eggs. Jeremy Isaacs, *Storm over Four* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp. 66–7.

28 An editor of the Irish edition of *The Sunday Times* specifically instructed a critic about to review a new Irish film: 'Half a page if you like it, a full page if you hate it'.

29 See *Hot Press* interviews with Patrick Bergin, 6 July 2000, and Brendan O'Carroll, 28 September 2000, at http://www.hotpress. com/archive.

30 This pluralism opposes the definition of an integrated national cinema 'consisting of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production'. David Bordwell et al., *The Classical Holywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. xiv.

cannot accept the 'wrong' result from the selection process.[26] This may also be a reflection of their underlying market vulnerability.

It is essential to utilize communications and marketing to retain an adequate degree of public, political and institutional support for the enterprise as a whole. The aggressive tabloid assault on Channel Four in its first year could have had potentially dangerous effects on the station; Jeremy Isaacs carried out a 'touch to the tiller', adding popular programmes like *A Woman of Substance* to adjust the perceived imbalance,[27] but it was the growing ratings and consequent advertising sales that relieved the pressure in the end. There may be a broad support for the project of a national cinema in Ireland, but journalists will undercut this attitude in their ideological tendency to attack semi-state structures and provide begrudging copy and negative reviews.[28] The distractions of the flak and incoming fire involved in funding have to be kept at bay – denunciations of the structure as a whole from disappointed applicants can break out unexpectedly.[29] Rigorous transparency in decision-making and strong morale and solidarity between the team and the board itself is probably the best protection.

Any attempt at a balance sheet in relation to Irish Film Board involvement in the production of approximately one hundred feature films, eight television series, sixty documentaries and 150 short films would point towards the achievement of a critical mass of new filmmaking in ten years, with range and diversity, albeit with some unevenness and lacunae. Luckily there are a good number of lucid intensities, films which are coherently themselves. Features as different[30] as *I Went Down* (Paddy Breathnach, 1997), *The General* (John Boorman, 1998), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Pat O'Connor, 1998), *Some Mother's Son* (Terry George, 1996), *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, 2002), *The Actors* (Conor McPherson, 2003), *Dead Bodies* (Robert Quinn, 2003) and *Intermission* (John Crowley, 2003); documentaries like *Chavez: the Revolution will not be Televised* (Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Brien, 2003) and *Rotha Mór an tSaoil/The Hard Road to Klondike* (Desmond Bell, 1999); and experimental work such as *I Could Read the Sky* (Nichola Bruce, 1999) and *Too Dark for Light* (Clare Langan, 2000).

New Irish cinema established a good relationship with its home audience, good returns for most theatrical releases, high levels of video hire and purchase and strong ratings on television. Fifty per cent of the Irish population had watched *The General* and twenty-five per cent *The Magdalene Sisters*, at a point when it was only available theatrically.

When the hype and spin is stripped away there is a revelation that something of the same proportionate configuration of success – the ratio between marvellous films and not-bad-but-uneven films, and films which did not work at all – is roughly consistent across commercial distributors, television commissioners and national film agencies. Variations of the same underlying performance pattern generally emerge from a relative perspective comparing different entities involved in film and even in other spheres such as music and publishing. This should

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not be a surprise where the underlying structures of curatorial taste are replicated in very different organizations.

Film in Europe and the row[31]

While my attentions were focused on Irish film for ten years I gradually began to stand back and look at the wider circumstance and ask what is the general context for any national cinema emanating from a small European country? What are the prospects for independent work which is formally or politically innovative at the present time? What are the spaces for personal or visionary filmmaking, or films which engage with the body politic? Indeed what is the outlook for the various versions of indigenous cinema in a global context saturated by American product?

The overall exchange rate couldn't be much worse:

94% of the films shown on Irish screens come from the US;
European films comprise 4% of US market share;
US films comprise 71% of European market share;
Europe constitutes 60–65% of the total international market for US product;
yet European films only comprise 22.5% of European market share.

Bankruptcies and restructuring in various distribution companies are indications of the breakdown of the.European industry's very fibre.[32] Within the niche market of art house production, distribution and exhibition continues to exist in a weakened, exposed form at this stage, especially in anglophone countries.[33] The experience of previous epochs, when a steady and successful pattern of successful annual releases by European auteurs took place, are long gone. Occasionally a new film by US independents or non-mainstream fare from around the world, including films from Africa, Asia and Latin America, still achieves some profile and reaches an international audience, but this only serves to mask the general reduction in space for such work. Third-world cinema is understood in terms of its refreshing authenticity and often its urgency, but its reach is precarious at home and distribution abroad has deteriorated for all the reasons above.[34] The underlying economics of exhibition in the art-house sector have become more precarious, depending on the uneven pattern of rare crossover successes. The staple fare for this sector is less stable and is also increasingly squeezed by the omnivorous multiplex releases.

Even the notable examples of contemporary independent cinema from the USA are all too often superficial, meretricious. New generations of US independents follow Jarmusch, the Coen brothers and Tarantino in adopting mannerist or formalist approaches to generic filmmaking without any substantial social engagement. Lamentably, it is also true that European (including Irish) films often do not seem to be 'about much' and find it difficult to combine political concern, significant form and pleasure. Understandably audiences will revile versions of gender,

31 Rest of the world.

32 *Focus 2003, Tendances du Marché Mondial du Film* (Brussels/Cannes: Observatoire Européen de l'Audiovisuel, 2003), p. 5.

33 Rod Stoneman, 'All generalisations are false', *Film Ireland* (November/December 2002); *Kinema* (Autumn 2002). URL: http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/stonm022.htm.

34 Rod Stoneman, 'African cinema: addressee unknown', *Vertigo* (Summer/Autumn 1993); *Ecrans d'Afrique*, nos 5/6; *Kinema* (Spring 1994). URL: http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/stonm941.htm.

class or race-by-numbers in a film, but remain open to projects undertaking subtle strategies of political engagement. Drama which plays through political issues and more intricate approaches to the dispositions of power and money is rarely seen.

The timidity of television schedules and the self-imposed inhibitions that constrain the transmission of subtitled films leave international cinema off the public airwaves. Maybe broadband access with a proliferation of internationally available digital channels may eventually open this work out to global versions of niche audiences,[35] although the US experience of multi-channel programming indicates an increase in vertical separation rather than horizontal diversity.

What has led to this bleak predicament? It is easy to denounce the dysfunctional market, but that is of little use if we have no operative understanding of it, or purchase on it. To some extent, across time, marketing has worked as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Clearly publicity and advertising cannot achieve success for each and every specific film;[36] but it has had a cumulative and pervasive effect. There is fierce competition within the different types of cinema as well as between them. Many studio films fail despite significant investment in P&A (marketing costs for the average studio picture have risen from $4.3 million in 1980 to $31 million in 2003), even the most skilful marketing cannot guarantee success at the box office – it is necessary but not sufficient. Marketing is an overdetermination on the functioning of the equation of supply and demand.

The cycle of created demand is locked into specific audience targeting, often focused on a teenage male demographic. It forces commercial movies to perform in their first weekend, as this is now the pressurized test for the prospects of a film which sustains its large-scale release. Across the last few decades mass marketing has determined an increasingly limited version of cinema and has shifted audience taste towards it. There has been a significant change whereby the US release of a new film twenty-five years ago, which would have initially entailed a small number of prints in major cities in order to build a success gradually, has now been replaced by 1000–4000 print saturation releases backed by $30–40 million spent on television advertising, often making a third of the box-office return in the first weekend. This clearly predicates the kind of cinema which can immediately find a wide audience and succeed.[37]

We are familiar with the ideological achievement of the market that has labelled itself as 'free' and describes itself as a neutral mechanism for responding to what the audience wants. In fact the market is a mechanism which is most efficient at fulfilling desires that it has itself created. The cinemagoing subject's desire (which has complex formative determinations from 'elsewhere') is held in dialectical tension with that which marketeers are suggesting should provide pleasure.

In some sense each film has to be 'the same but different' – similar enough to repeat the experience of pleasure in order to maintain its

35 Many now see films on DVD – a format and an exhibition context which allows access to a much greater variety of cinema, formerly restricted, including esoteric and 'minority' films.

36 The other side to this is the old grumble from distributors: 'filmmakers always think that if it succeeds it's a good film, if it fails it was a bad campaign!'

37 See John Boorman, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2003, and *Adventures of a Suburban Boy* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), pp. 251, 295; Mike Figgis (ed.), *Hollywood Film-makers on Film-making, Projections 10* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 12.

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exchange value, different enough not to exactly replicate previous experience. But the creation of novel appeal depends largely on reference to what has already been enjoyed; people's preferences are a product, at least in part, of their past choices. In the aggressively competitive economic terrain that exists for film production, this has become an increasingly narrow and centripetal force. What is made is determined by the notion of the popular, which is based on what is made available, which itself is predicated on popular taste. A warning note about the mechanisms of marketing and the role of branding was sounded recently when a European animation feature was shown to a test audience in California and the ratings on the test cards were four to five. The same film was screened to a different audience with the Disney logo spliced at the front of the film, and the test cards came back with average scores of seven to eight.[38]

The relative dominance of a mercantile mentality in the distribution and production sectors enhances this centripetal tendency; the process of convergence and the removal of difference leads to a more proficient process with less 'waste' in the system. Despite the resources of industrial filmmaking,[39] the endeavour to make supply and demand coincide exactly in terms of new movie releases will ultimately fail; but the continued movement towards this goal is clearly having deleterious side effects.

The signifying system of any one film is a complex construction, as are the reception parameters of its audience, but across large numbers of films a pattern is beginning to emerge: US films are achieving, despite the proliferation of screens in most countries by multiplex building, higher overall attendance figures with fewer films. It is significant that ten top films currently take approximately forty per cent of the UK box office each year;[40] and this is linked to the doubling of the average cost of the production of US majors' feature films from $29 million in 1992 to $59 million in 2002. On average European features currently cost $5 million to make[41] and simply cannot complete with the dominant mode of production.

The deployment of a market process as the natural and neutral expression of individual choice is also central to electoral cycles and the popular plebiscite in social democracy, and depends upon the pivotal pun in political 'representation'. This discursive circularity whereby what people want is what they get, and vice versa, is taken to be democratic expression in our societies, most visibly in the USA – a system recently and succinctly described as 'a plutocracy maintained by PR'.[42]

The effects of this conjuring trick have recently permeated the national film agencies and media institutions. It has achieved invisibility – 'It is when history is denied', Barthes writes, 'that it is most unmistakably at work'.[43] Public service systems, television stations and film agencies are increasingly ideologically attuned to the bogus paradigm of the market and to the macho achievement of proximate financial returns. Hence there is an increasing role for distributors in anglophone public funding

38 Reported by G. Shirren, Terraglyph, Dublin.

39 The dichotomy between the artisanal and industrial modes of production is outlined in Stoneman, 'Under the shadow of Hollywood'.

40 44% in 2001 and 38% in 2002. Screen Finance, 26 February 2003.

41 Focus 2003, Tendances du Marché Mondial du Film.

42 Danny Morrison, The Examiner (May 2003).

43 Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), p.2.

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agencies and the deployment of a naive notion of the 'end-user'. They are now moving their versions of priorities, practices and criteria for commissioning inexorably towards larger budgets with stronger star casting. The exigencies of economic and ratings pressures that traverse television have led to the articulation of the same discourses, populist approaches that excuse their policies by espousing market mechanism and rejecting any more demanding cinema as 'elitist'; the film agencies also emanate from 'modernized' political formations[44] that formulate their policies passively in response to market research, attaching themselves to the same self-fulfilling prophecy, the same circular process. So that when television executives calculate ratings, distributors anticipate cinema audiences and film agencies consult sales agents, these all point to the same reduced parameters of taste which then consolidate and reinforce each other in a vicious circle. These discourses all work to narrow the field of cultural diversity – clearly we are witnessing a slow and uneven historical process, but it seems to be moving in one adverse direction.

Despite these underlying tidal movements in the economy of world cinema – international phenomena such as film festivals on the surface display an energetic cornucopia of myriad small films in all their bravery and diversity, and continue to expand. These short-term celebratory enclaves, glimpses of 'how it could be', play to a wider public in their locale and are populated with echelons of the 'people of cinema': professional cinephiles, critics-with-taste, other festival programmers, intelligent distributors who can only afford smaller and more personal films, art house cinema proprietors, film society aficionados. Festivals play a crucial role in delivering the delicatessen of cultural cinema to niche audiences. The spirited celebration of cinema in the marginal spaces of festivals and film magazines allows for those directly involved

PRESENT AT THE END OF CINEMA

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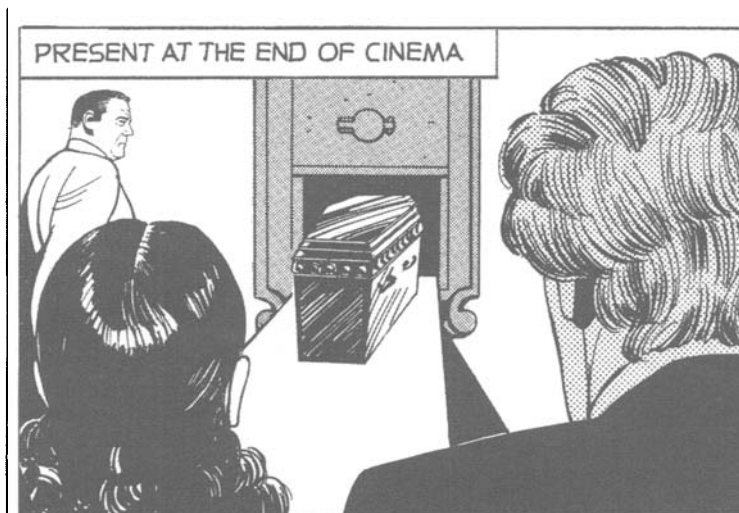
to maintain the delusion that such cinema is flourishing and to exist in a state of denial that the situation has not deteriorated in the last few decades. This is not to dismiss them as hobbyists, with all the associated fetishism of film buffs/buffoonery, but these activities must be seen in perspective and in proportion. What is the scale of general and public attention to the different versions of cinema? What is easily available in theatres or on television for most of the rest of the year?

The increasing hegemony of industrial cinema during this period reinforces the predicament of isolation and marginalization for independent film and reduces the possibilities of regeneration via narrow specialist audiences. There seems to be a diminution of critical mass for this work in relation to a greater dispersion of attention towards mainstream forms of film in contemporary media.

In 1992 I wrote:

> Meanwhile the British government has constructed haphazard legislation designed to release market forces which themselves, in the longer term, will lead to new, more congenial and conservative configurations. This is a subtle, British way of reshaping broadcasting in an ideologically more amenable form.[45]

45 Stoneman, 'Sins of commission', p. 144.

And indeed there has been further significant deterioration in the situation of public service television and European cinema in the decade since the article was written. There may be other shorter-term explanations of worsening conditions in television, and their replication ten years later in cinema, but we should also seek to understand the underlying structural changes – the audience mutations that underlie what was happening in television also reinforce shifts in cinema.

The results are clear – after long decades of uneven climate change, artistically innovative and progressive approaches to making films and reading them are severely marginalized and normally represented as 'out of date'. The very discourses in which film is discussed have undermined radical approaches. The new politically-correct line, that the politically correct is incorrect, is itself incorrect. Is this the nadir? On what basis and in what way could we imagine this situation may be reversed?

Of course we have to believe that the possibilities of renewal and change persist within the undeniably difficult conditions of the present moment. This is hopefully merely a transient time when the hegemony of the specious and the mistaken is pervasive, when progressive, imaginative or politically dissident work is hardly present. We can continue to believe in creative oppositional practices which still hope to summon a better world into being.[46]

46 See Isaac Julien, 'Closing remarks', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 45 no. 4 (2003), p. 78.

Horizons/orisons

Maybe it was always an illusion to think that progressive film would ever be more than a marginalized activity, a minority sport? Perhaps the

aspiration for wider audiences for independent work was always ill-judged and mistaken. But for someone who joined Channel Four from the London Filmmakers' Co-op end of the Independent Film-makers' Association, and witnessed the way in which, presented correctly, creative and intelligent work could attract substantial audiences, the current remission is a sad retreat.

Perhaps some elements of the bleak exposition sketched above connect with resignation, a midlife contemplation of passivity or defeat? Enhanced expectations grew from the privilege of participating in two such optimistic moments of brave aspiration; the cultural formation of a *soixante-huitard* were reinforced by the courageous stage of a new television station and the initiation of a new phase of national cinema in Ireland.[47] Now these hopes must be set against the backdrop of structural shifts of the cultural and political climate that have occluded and truncated progressive openings. Channel Four and the Irish Film Board are not to be viewed as experiments which failed but, together with other examples of progressive audiovisual constellations, as sketches of the future's possibility. There is always that complex delineation of the determination that one's personal and subjective perspective has in inflecting an understanding of the external and objective situation. I talked of the '*D'ou je parle*' in the original 'Sins of commission' – is current pessimism merely a side effect of age and exhaustion?[48]

A more hopeful prognosis can be imagined – the skirmishes of ideas continue, progressive cultural forms may evolve and, at some point, help create the reflux. We can persist, aided by the lubrications of irony, in confronting the current difficult predicament.[49] Then, frankly, there are underlying motives closer to the configurations of personal desires that retain involvement in alternative forms of cinema. Many of us are paid, modestly enough, for these esoteric activities. Persistence may seem a perverse pleasure, but the fact that independent film is not gaining ground after so many years of endeavour is not a reason for abandoning the field of contention.

Perhaps some version of these understandings can take us from naivete to a more pragmatic place; more honest and realistic appraisals, allowing us adequate complexity to navigate beyond the contemporary terrain. Emancipatory forces develop under different banners, with new names and new acronyms, taking new routes. Whole majorities of the world's populace are under-represented on our screens. Disparities of wealth and power will regenerate resistance in and through new forms of film and culture.[50]

As smaller and more occasional interventions can become islands of counteraction, other more participatory images may emerge within the general noise of the Spectacle. Cultural spaces open up unexpectedly, windows of opportunity present themselves for brief moments in particular places.[51] Perhaps we need to recalibrate our expectations, concentrating on the interstitial, the interception of audiences' tastes and desires. Accepting that there are even some advantages of the marginal,

47 Although I began drafting this essay in the last years at the Irish Film Board, I left the agency in September 2003 to become involved in setting up the Huston School of Film & Digital Media at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

48 Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/mi rotrovai per una selva oscura/che la diritta cia era smarrita (And I found myself in the middle of my life/and lost in a dark wood/with no direction home). Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Canto I.*

49 'The only causes worth fighting for are lost causes', as Noël Burch and Thom Anderson suggested in their film *Red Hollywood* (1994).

50 See Stoneman, 'Sins of commission', p. 143.

51 There is some resonance between the narrower cultural contention discussed here with those glimpses of real political possibility in the wider historical terrain: say Orwell observing Catalonia in 1937, the guerrilleros liberating Cuba in 1959, Thomas Sankara's Burkina Faso in 1985, and perhaps Chávez in Venezuela at this time. It is not a surprise that the prospects and patterns of change in culture are as remote and precarious as the possibilities of thoroughgoing political transformation.

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the peripheral, the precarious. It is through defiance and perseverance that a new generation of initiatives will serve to keep these forms of questioning open, this scepticism alive, in a time of dispersion. As Oscar Wilde wrote: 'A map of the world that does not include the territory of Utopia is not worth even glancing at'.[52]

The future is unwritten and cannot be second-guessed. In fact the only prediction we can be sure of is that our future history will not be as we have predicted it. However, in order not to descend into repetition or farce, analyses of recent experience will have to be brought into conjunction with the possibilities that unfold. It is the endurance of the glacial present that provides the conditions for renewal and the realization of systemic radical change.

Coda

As Lindsay Anderson suggested shortly after making *If . . .*, The older you grow, the more you are conscious of and believe in and have to accept the ambiguities of existence . . . and you know that in every truth the opposite is also true. The very important thing is to perceive *that* truth, and yet hold the opposite of *that* truth, which is that there *is* a truth.'[53]

52 Perry Anderson envisages the renewal of utopian energies more historically in 'The river of time', *New Left Review*, no. 26 (March-April 2004).

53 Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 75.

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Report on the first Ramallah International Film Festival

KAY DICKINSON

Unusual as it might seem to many readers of *Screen*, the West Bank city of Ramallah used to have a reputation for bringing tourism and film culture together. Once a popular resort for vacationing Arabs, Ramallah played host to Egyptian cinema's queen bee Fatin Hamama and her then paramour, Omar Sharif. And yet, despite being something of the gilded cage of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (not being subject to the same strict curfews as some of the northerly West Bank towns), most European or North American people I have spoken to about my trip were visibly jolted when I prefixed 'Ramallah' to 'International Film Festival'. If, as Colin McArthur maintains, the objectives of most film festivals are 'to confer prestige on a locality and to attract tourists',[1] how might the distinctly non-leisurely geopolitical connotations of such a location interfere with any plans to make it a more frequented holiday spot? How does the media projection of 'Ramallah' work on a global scale to manufacture the idea that holding an international film festival here is incongruous, and how might all this infringe upon the basic human rights of the city's inhabitants to celebrate culture in some form of 'internationalized' manner?

Whilst it is customary for festival reports to skip through a multitude of succinct film reviews and run ticks down an attendance register of cinema notables, this format seems less appropriate to the Ramallah International Film Festival (RIFF), given the more pressing questions outlined above. Moreover, aside from a stream of new Palestinian shorts, the programme would hold very few surprises for the average European or American arthouse frequenter (*Sweet Sixteen, City of God, Monsoon Wedding, Crimson Gold, Spellbound*, the latest Godard,

1   Colin McArthur, 'The rises and falls of the Edinburgh International Film Festival', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: a Scottish Film Book* (Edinburgh: Scottish Film Council/ British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 91–102, p. 91.

Our Music ...). But this, for me, of secondary importance to the institution of the event itself, its international representatives (present as people, ideas and funding bodies) and their interactions with the local population. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to heed Julian Stringer, who proposes that we

> pay as much attention to the spatial logics of the historical and contemporary festival circuit as we do to the film it exhibits. The circuit exists is an allegorization of space and its power relationships; it operates through the transfer of value between and within distinct geographical localities.[2]

2 Julian Stringer, 'Global cities and the international film festival economy', in Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 138.

Before rendering this objective particular to Ramallah, though, it is vital to sketch out the workings of film culture in Palestine, markedly different as they are to those of most other countries in the world.

Infrastructurally, the Occupied Palestinian Territories have no freestanding film schools, although production is taught in the major universities. There is little funding for fiction films and most of the money that directors compete for is distributed by various non-governmental organizations and charities, who seem to demand consciousness-raising from their commissions through clear and unequivocal aesthetic means. Local television networks, which perhaps provide the bulk of the job opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers, also err towards the direct reportage style supported by news broadcasting across the globe. These factors have had their impact on what might be called the Palestinian film form tradition, to which the Palestinian Silver Screen section of the festival (which ran every evening and showcased more than twenty films) paid witness. Throughout most of these entries, the accent was placed on the revelation of chilling violations of human dignity and safety (such as the threat to Hebronites from settlers in Hanna Musleh's *In the Spider's Web*). If there seemed to be one abiding aspiration binding together a large number of the Palestinian films in this strand of the RIFF, then it was the hope that documentary renditions – from talking heads to on-the-spot footage – would be able to elucidate the suffering of Palestinian subjects to the world. Almost in opposition to this, there are other directors – such as Elia Suleiman, Michel Khleifi, Hani Abu Asa'd and Anne-Marie Jacir (the latter being the only one to have a film screened at the festival) – whose more oblique and often more poetic treatment of their material is steeped in a cynicism about the possibility of forging a connection between cinema and truth via these particular formal conventions. These filmmakers (Jacir to one side) are, it must be stressed, associated with longer movies and benefit from larger production budgets than most Palestinian documentarists can ever hope to secure.

The varied characteristics of contemporary Palestinian cinema are, of course, more comprehensible if contemplated alongside a recent history of film viewing within the Occupied Territories. Cinemas have decreased in numbers of late due to their deliberate destruction by the

3 Alia Arasoughly (personal correspondence) and George Khleifi 'A chronicle of Palestinian cinema' (forthcoming in Hebrew, provided via personal correspondence with the author, 2003), p. 40.

Israeli forces (and a lack of funds to restore them), the enforced closures that have taken place throughout the two intifadas, and an understandable decrease in audience figures because of the more palpable threat to security that Palestinians feel in the evenings (if a town is under curfew, nocturnal forays mean literally putting one's life at risk).[3] There is also an anti-film contingent within Palestinian society: one cinema in Gaza has suffered fire damage in the hands of an Islamist group. In addition, as George Khleifi points out,

> Even if the cinemas have not been closed, it is reasonable to suppose that Israeli censorship bodies and the military government will create difficulties in order to impede the screening of Palestinian movies in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Cultural and artistic events which express Palestinian nationality are seen by the Israeli military government as acts of incitement. Exhibitions of plastic art and painting, as well as poetry and theatrical events, have been obliged to receive special permission from the Israeli government. Usually, these permissions have not been granted.[4]

4 Khleifi, 'A chronicle of Palestinian cinema', p. 42.

All this, Khleifi concludes, means that Palestinian films are perhaps more widely seen at international film festivals than they are in Palestine itself.

A further inhibition to film exposure in the country is the coerced restriction of the movement of Palestinian citizens by the Israeli army through the checkpoint and ID system. Jerusalem, which benefits from thriving multicultural film programming, is off-limits to most Ramallans, despite the fact that this neighbouring city is only a fifteen-minute drive away. People are, by force, more inclined to stay at home and watch the local news instead – which offers some insight into why its styles are filtering into Palestinian film. Distribution is also unreliable, as the festival itself witnessed when Mossad (the Israeli Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks) 'appropriated' its projector and another had to be borrowed from Nazareth at very short notice. To counteract such difficulties, mobile cinema units have operated in Palestine since at least 1992, although most have been closed down since the outbreak of the second intifada. Since then, according to filmmaker and Al-Quds (Jerusalem) University lecturer, Alia Arasoughly: 'The current public viewing of productions, mostly documentaries by Palestinian directors, is done through community groups, cultural organizations and NGOs in cities, towns and refugee camps'.[5]

5 Alia Arasoughly, personal correspondence.

Not surprisingly such films are almost entirely sympathetic to the kinds of groups that are screening them, something which results in a programming agenda that is distinct from those of the remaining commercial theatres. The cinemas that have survived the occupation thus far entice their largest crowds with popular Egyptian comedies, although the cultural centres of Ramallah also show non-Arabic 'art films' and documentaries at the rate of about four screenings per month to a small but dedicated audience with a demographic breakdown that one could

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6 Information provided by Reem Fadda, programmes coordinator for the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, Ramallah (personal correspondence).

7 And, because of the demographic breakdown of the city, this 'fraction' is perhaps less likely to be representative of West Bankers as a whole than the inhabitants of other areas. For a variety of reasons, Ramallah is home to many ex-patriots and NGO-related internationals (some of Palestinian origin, others not) and is generally considered to be more affluent, 'cosmopolitan', and aware of global trends in art and culture. It is likely that many people from outside Ramallah would have considered the choice of that location to be a somewhat preferential treatment of an already privileged and elite group.

8 Fatin Farhat, telephone interview conducted in English.

9 Unfortunately, though, many of the screenings were held at the new Ramallah Cultural Palace, which is on the outskirts of town and cannot be accessed by public transport. For those without cars, the return taxi ride proved more expensive than the ticket.

10 Similar support was provided by the British Council and the European Cultural Foundation.

11 Fatin Farhat, telephone interview.

12 The politics of such donations from overseas are loaded within Palestine because the Israeli economy is so extensively supported by aid from the USA, in amounts which by far exceed those received by any other countries.

13 Such were the numbers of volunteers (most of them under twenty-five years of age) that there were often more of them at screenings than paying customers – revealing much about the desire to provide something by way of cultural life to Ramallah in ratio to the volumes of people actually wishing to buy tickets to sustain such a cinema culture.

expect anywhere else in the world.[6] Such opportunities are not afforded either to those living in more beleaguered cities like Nablus, Hebron and Gaza City (where enforced closures of such institutions are more widespread) or to people from smaller towns and villages, who lack these resources and are forbidden from making the short journey to any such screenings in cities like Ramallah.

With these restrictions on movement, the festival administration was inspired to bring as many films as possible as cheaply as could be managed to one of the larger West Bank conurbations, knowing full well that only a fraction of the Palestinian population would be able to attend.[7] The premiering of brand new feature films was never truly countenanced, as such privileges are usually coaxed out of production companies with the promise that international distribution personnel will be in attendance and may well snap up the goods. This could hardly be guaranteed at the first run of such an event. Without this dynamic of exclusivity driving the programming, the RIFF can be seen to be motivated by different aspirations than most other international film festivals. Fatin Farhat, the event's co-director explains:

> The main issue for us was bringing international cinema to Palestine, particularly keeping in mind that the Palestinian population has been culturally isolated for the last four years. . . . But the most important goal was to develop the Palestinian audiovisual sector, to give opportunities to Palestinians directors, to allow them to develop and to become known to the guests of the festival.[8]

To this end, the RIFF not only kept its prices deliberately low (a day pass cost less than a standard commercial cinema ticket)[9] without any expectation of generating profit, but also drew significant backing from the UNDP/PAPP (United Nations Development Programme/ Programme of Assistance for the People of Palestine) which donated around $50,000 to be spent through the year.[10] As Farhat clarifies: 'The UNDP supports projects that have to do with institutionalization, with infrastructure-building; they're more interested in long-term, sustainable projects . . . . This was how the money was justified.'[11] As such, the festival is perhaps best understood as a structure made possible not by the commercial sector, or even through more local interests, but as part of an international venture that can be more solidly interpreted as the endowment of 'aid'.[12]

This formation is also apparent in the fact that the event was staffed largely by volunteers, driven by the thought of contributing something to their community and of numbing the boredom of being indefinitely trapped within the parameters of the Ramallah municipality.[13] Similarly, from outside the city limits work was offered for free by international (mainly European) contributors in the form of 'developmental' workshops, such as animation courses for children in refugee camps. The prizes for schoolchildren's scriptwriting and Palestinian Silver Screen competitions came in the form not of golden statuettes but appropriate

educational opportunities (mainly overseas) for the adults, and DV cameras and editing equipment for the children to share with their schools.

As Janet Harbord points out, film festivals (at least in the European context) have almost always been part of a larger campaign of regeneration.[14] Whilst this can certainly be seen to be the case in the RIFF's emphasis on pedagogy, the regenerative vein also runs deep in the festival's aim of restoring to Ramallah some of the cultural occurrences of everyday life elsewhere, promoting the possibility of a community living beyond the limits of basic need and its relief. Haris Pasovic, the film and theatre director who ran the Sarajevo International Film Festival in the middle of that town's besiegement, directly expresses what Ramallans too are experiencing:

> You don't have to have everything fine to want to see movies . . . . You see them because you want to connect, to communicate from your position on the other side of the moon, to check whether you still belong to the same reality as the rest of the world. The favorite question of journalists during my festival was 'Why a film festival during the war?' My answer was 'Why the war during a film festival?' It was the siege that was unusual, not the festival. It was like we didn't have a life before, like our natural state of mind and body was war.[15]

This insistence on Ramallah's entitlement to 'carry on as normal' was, for the organizers and supporters of the RIFF, something that had to be tightly knitted into an anticolonial struggle for cultural autonomy. Unfortunately, Palestinians more commonly feel that quotidian existence is scarred by acts of aggressive occupation that include the intention to erase or paralyze their cultural production and consumption. Universities have been repeatedly road-blocked, UNESCO-protected architectural and archaeological sites have been irreparably damaged and yet, despite the difficulties of making, distributing, seeing and discussing films in the Occupied Territories, film culture has, arguably, been less actively targeted for this kind of subjugation. Although the trivialization of cinema is the bane of most film scholars' lives, its purported harmlessness has perhaps allowed it a little more leeway in this specific context.[16] Practical sessions on pitching films to overseas markets, for instance, took place undisturbed during the RIFF, and the Palestinian Silver Screen section opened up a forum in which every single film was a vibrant assertion of Palestine's traditions, history and artistic heritage and a recognition of the crushing effects of the occupation.

Amical Cabral defines imperialism as the incapacity of the local population to control their production because it is restricted, stopped, exploited or overrun by the imperial force. Culture is inextricably woven into this, not only because it can serve to reiterate an historical identity that predates colonization or to share strategies of survival and

14 Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 61–2.

15 Haris Pasovic, quoted in Kenneth Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 104–5.

16 That said, there are also a fair number of Palestinians who dismiss film culture, believing it to be a frivolous diversion in a time of crisis.

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17 Amical Cabral, 'National liberation and culture', trans. Maureen Webster, delivered as a lecture at Syracuse University, New York, 1970. Posted by Runoko Rashidi on URL: http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/cabral.html

resistance, but also because it is a sphere of production itself.[17] In holding a series of workshops and events that were devoted to cultural processes, manufacture and small-scale marketing rather than simply structuring an event around the consumption of finished film products, the RIFF was dedicated to this form of anticolonial work. The RIFF was by no means unprecedented in amalgamating these aims of emancipation into the festival framework – Ramallah and other Palestinian regions regularly hold such events and have done so throughout history, perhaps even more effectively. The RIFF's contentiousness in this respect, rather, was generated by the presence of the word 'international' in its title and its skewed balancing of local and international presences, economies and interests, which, at times, caused great consternation amongst the community of Ramallah.

The least troublesome 'international' factor was the promotion that Ramallah, as a festival location and thus as a town, received from the event. Lengthy, supportive articles in *The Guardian, The Independent* and *Le Monde* appeared, and, by the end of the festival, there was a web presence that ran into hundreds of references. The common thread joining all these reports seemed to be their objective of restoring esteem to Ramallah's vibrant art scene within foreign opinion, and deflecting attention, if only momentarily, from the constant reports about suicide bombers, and so on, elsewhere in these newspapers. There is also a distinct possibility that the festival's multicultural guest list (including members of the press) may have provided a protective umbrella over Ramallah for this very brief time. An 'international presence' has taken on a specific meaning in the Israel–Palestine conflict through the activities of the 'global witness-focused' International Solidarity Movement (and the related deaths of Tom Hurndall and Rachel Corey at the hands of the Israeli army). Security checks at the entry points into Israel now include attempts to halt such campaigners, despite their so far entirely lawful means of protesting.

As this example elucidates, when incidents take on an international dimension, the flows of power and privilege are frequently uneven, sometimes blocked. Palestinians, as a population, are acutely aware of the gross discrimination embedded within global capitalism, how their borders are colonially impinged upon, how the world's media projects a bias against them, how international communication is denied them in multiple forms. Simultaneously, the concept of 'the national' is central to the struggle for liberation, particularly in the absence of any viable or strong state. If an internationalism is invoked (as it was by the RIFF), it is immediately measured against the failure of an abstracted or legally constituted concept of 'the international' to preserve what it has promised and what it has failed to deliver to the inhabitants of the country and its huge refugee population. Moreover, in a country that feels itself to be both occupied and geographically trapped, and throughout a diaspora of refugees who have been largely denied the right to return to

18 The Israeli authorities, in violation of United Nations Resolution 192, deny entry to the majority of Palestinian refugees who wish to resettle on what was once – or still is – their own land.

19 Youssef e-Shayeb, 'An unofficial reckoning of the Ramallah International Film Festival: worldwide success, local failure . . . and wholesale administrative errors', Al-Ayaam, culture supplement, no. 3058 (27 July 2004). Translation by Abdulhadi Ayyad.
20 Harbord, Film Cultures, p. 66.

their homeland,[18] these issues have an overwhelmingly concrete and brutally spatial dimension. The idea of an international festival that effortlessly or unquestioningly skips across boundaries is impossible to conceive of for the average Palestinian – and yet interdependency that transcends national borders is an absolute economic necessity within most film production.

The RIFF's positioning amidst such spatialized dynamics was most vociferously attacked at a local level in a lengthy article in the Ramallan daily newspaper Al-Ayaam, written by Yousef e-Shayeb.[19] Although its grievances were largely to do with bad organization, they crystallized, for e-Shayeb, in unease at how the international guests were pampered at the expense of local contributors.

If, as Janet Harbord contends, 'Film festivals serve a global function in advertising cultural products, generating information about them and situating a point of information exchange',[20] then the RIFF was seen as wanting by figures such as e-Shayeb in its promotional facilitation. Local filmmakers complained bitterly that, although the festival as an event was gaining remarkable coverage and support, its key product should not have been itself, but the films made by Palestinians that it purported, amongst other aims, to want to show off. No retrospective of the best of Palestinian cinema was on offer (as might be expected from the first event of this kind), and the programme for the Palestinian Silver Screen failed, initially, to detail when each of the many films was to be screened. Distribution professionals did not appear to have been invited as a priority and, moreover, their jobs would have been complicated by this perceived sidelining of Palestinian contributions.

Alia Arasoughly, a Palestinian Silver Screen entrant, argues that the RIFF

> accentuated the schism between North and South which film festivals in all countries of the world hope to bridge. It gave special privilege to the internationals while marginalizing and down-playing the locals. As a Palestinian woman filmmaker whose work showed in the festival and who participated in nearly all the activities of the festival, I was very acutely aware of this value system. I haven't experienced it when I've travelled abroad to other film festivals to show some of my own work, where I felt respected and where the local filmmakers were themselves featured as the center-piece of the festival. In RIFF, unfortunately and disturbingly so, it was the opposite, the internationals were the stars and we were the extras. This contributed to a lot of anger and resentment among Palestinian filmmakers who felt that they were culturally neo-colonized in a festival in their own country. The festival felt as if it was expensive tourism for the internationals, an ego-trip for the organizer, and a further exercise in making Palestinians powerless and voiceless in their own lives, now in the cultural area.[21]

21 Alia Arasoughly, personal correspondence.

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Continuing with this metaphorically resonant and specifically materialized geopolitical line of attack, Khaled 'Alayan from Ramallah's Al-Qasaba cinematheque declared:

> The impression I got as, first and foremost, a cinema-goer, was one of offence. [The festival director Adam Zuabi] behaved as if he were an outsider coming to a culturally impoverished country. He presented to the world this image of himself as a saviour coming to rescue the Palestinians from their cultural swamp.[22]

22 Quoted in e-Shayeb, 'An unofficial reckoning'.

Although this image of a Fitzcarraldo figure pervades the Palestinian reviews of the RIFF that – with very good reason – condemn such 'adventurer-discoverer' or 'missionary' objectives as smacking of quasi-colonialism, it is these critics' simultaneous wrangling with the lost economic possibilities of 'the international' as it might have unfolded in the politically resonant locale of Ramallah that allows for a broader, less personalized and perhaps more longsighted analysis of the event.

Not only is space a key issue in all of these evaluations, but travel and tourism feature highly as factors that were seen to marginalize the Palestinians, who are supposed to have benefited from the event. From the perspective of several such participants, the arrival of internationals had less to do with developing the audiovisual sector than providing them with a travel package that confirmed their preconceptions about the region. As Alia Arasoughly pithily puts it: 'Palestine was the bait. Films and a festival in a war zone catering only to internationals.'[23] Whilst tourism is vital to how festivals generate revenue,[24] how that tourism is circumscribed, what its political resonances are for all involved and who is to profit from the experience are all imperative questions.

The worries of Palestinians like Arasoughly that the festival was selling a brush with war-torn hardships, and generating sentiments of pity rather than respect for professional dignity, was somewhat compounded by a European participant filmmaker who was heard to grumble: 'Where are the dead bodies? I've nothing to film here.' The festival guests were cocooned in expensive hotels, packed onto their own minibuses for a series of day trips, and a banquet with Yasser Arafat, to which none of the Palestinian media industry workers were invited, was held in their honour. The international crowd's excited talk of lying about their destination at Tel Aviv airport, being belittled by young armed Israelis at checkpoints and seeing the Wall, all within earshot of people whose experiences of such occurrences are much more complicated and dangerous, made such encounters appear like a momentary and easily escaped exercise in radical chic to many Palestinian onlookers.[25]

Ironically, it was the ambition of being a normal city (one that hosts international festivals and enjoys global film culture, for instance) that initiated the RIFF, but it was Ramallah's very *abnormality* that attracted the attentions of the non-Palestinian guests. Fatin Farhat, weighing up the shortcomings of the festival, draws the pressing and politically-loaded distinction that

23 Alia Arasoughly, personal correspondence.

24 See, for instance, the persuasive arguments to this effect in Martin Auty and Gillian Hartnoll (eds), *Water Under the Bridge: 25 Years of the London Film Festival (BFI Dossier No. 12)* (London: British Film Institute, 1981); Niels Buch-Jepsen, 'Fespaco and the transformations of pan-African film promotion', *Senses of Cinema*. URL: ⟨http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/festivals/03/26/fespaco.html; Harbord, *Film Cultures*; McArthur, 'The rises and falls of the Edinburgh International Film Festival', pp. 91–102; Stringer, 'Global cities and the international film festival economy'; Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo*.

25 And amongst all this I have to position my self as a not entirely guiltless foreign visitor to the West Bank.

26 Fatin Farhat, telephone interview.

27 For instance, Reem Fadda (in
personal correspondence)
remonstrates that 'the festival
went terribly in terms of the
organizational standards to which
the people of Ramallah are used',
and Palestinian film director Suphi
Zubaidi declared in e-Shayeb, 'An
unofficial reckoning' that 'we have
the resources and the
competences to hold an
international film festival, and to
the highest standards'.

the international visitors would see the festival as a success because they came with the expectation that things don't work well in Palestine, which is a false assumption, I must say. . . . But this is not the case because Palestinian organizations, when they hold festivals or other cultural activities, run them well and local people are pretty upset with the practice of blaming everything on the occupation and the checkpoints. They're very well aware that these excuses no longer hold and this can't be used for marketing. . . . You can't fool the people of Ramallah who are used to a certain standard, in spite of everything.[26]

Whilst other Ramallans were similarly outraged at this outcome,[27] the final affront for many such complainants was that many of the internationals' trips were funded by *developmental* agencies and the benefits of such spending were not always immediately apparent. Despite the good that may have come from the international exposure, the educational events and the opportunities afforded to competition winners, the juxtaposition of various vital relationships to space was still seen to be ill negotiated by the festival in the eyes of many Ramallans. Adding insult to injury, a short walk from the RIFF's major venue afforded anyone interested a stunning hilltop view of Jerusalem. This is a Holy City to the two major religions of Ramallah, yet, despite being barely 'a stone's throw' away (the ultimate worry of the Israeli army), it is forbidden to most who live in Ramallah.

However, it is this potential of viewing from a distance as opposed to direct experience that makes film culture and the RIFF initiative so crucial – and not just to the Palestinians, because we are all implicated in the dynamics of this substitution. A director's Q&A following the screening of Simone Bitton's new documentary *The Wall* (an event loosely affiliated with the festival and taking place the day after its closing ceremony) was filled with as much consternation about 'positive' and 'negative' representation as one might expect from so loaded a use of the media to depict such a controversial new development in Israeli–Palestinian relations as a vast concrete partition being erected in the region. The to-ing and fro-ing of this discussion was put to a sharp halt by the impassioned thanks that a member of the audience, scarcely managing to express herself through her tears, offered the filmmaker, a French Jew: 'Thank you for showing me the Wall, as a Palestinian, I will never be able to see all of it.'

And so, despite all the teething problems, there is much to be gained – bitter-sweet as it may often be – from the initiation of such interactions between Palestinian and overseas film cultures. As most of the critics argued, the work that must be done in future years is the generation of images that surpass the limitations of such restrictively foreign fantasies and recording apparatuses.

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Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*. New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003, 240 pp.
Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, 288 pp.

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Gilles Deleuze's place in film studies remains deeply uncertain. The main impediment to the success of his ideas is possibly a result of the need to learn what appears to be a new language, a whole new lexicon of analytical terms and descriptive concepts. And, much like the language that accompanied psychoanalytic and linguistic approaches to film theory in the 1970s,[1] there is a sense in which one has to learn a special language to become Deleuzian. To enable one to speak of nomads, rhizomes, deterritorialization and bodies-without-organs, one must acquire a general language of Deleuzianism. To become conversant with Deleuze's approach to film theory, it is as if a whole new language of speaking about films must be learnt, so much so that each of Deleuze's books on cinema features a glossary of terms: action-image, perception-image, mental-image, hyalosign, lectosign, and the list goes on.[2] The difficulty of learning, relearning and unlearning a whole host of film theoretical terms may, for many, be a challenge whose rewards appear to be relatively minor. Ronald Bogue's *Deleuze on Cinema* and Patricia Pisters's *The Matrix of Visual Culture* try to argue that the challenge and difficulty of Deleuze is worth the effort. Both try to demonstrate that Deleuze offers important insights into the nature of cinema and that these insights are valuable for film studies. Bogue defends Deleuze's 'general conception of cinema as a mode of thought' (p. 2), while Pisters unpacks some of Deleuze's concepts in order 'to demonstrate how some of his ideas can work' (p. 9). Each of these books is dedicated, then, to showing how Deleuze's approach to cinema can be of use, and why it is important.

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3 Alongside *Deleuze on Cinema*, Bogue has produced *Deleuze on Literature* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003), and *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003).

4 Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Wake: Tributes and Tributaries* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); *Deleuze and Guattari* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1989).

5 D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

6 See Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, p. 35; Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 59.

Bogue's contribution is one of a trio of books on 'Deleuze and the arts'.[3] In addition he has recently published a collection of essays on Deleuze, and previously published one of the first studies on Deleuze and his sometime writing companion, Félix Guattari.[4] His aim in *Deleuze on Cinema* is straightforwardly exegetical: he wants to inform his readers in as clear a manner as possible what Deleuze's cinema books are about. It is inevitable that *Deleuze on Cinema* will be compared with the other great English-language study of Deleuze's cinema books, D.N. Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*.[5] Such a comparison holds only to a limited degree, however. Rodowick's book is far more argumentative insofar as it advocates a philosophy – or even a politics – of Deleuze's *time-image* in order to forge new ground for a political engagement with film theory. Bogue's aim is rather more down to earth: a step-by-step guide to Deleuze on cinema. And Bogue does an astounding job. He systematically unfolds the complex semiotic categories Deleuze employed in order to classify film's modes of operation, piece by piece, concept by concept, sign by sign, from the beginning of *Cinema 1* through to the end of *Cinema 2*. In doing so, Bogue demonstrates just how systematic a thinker Deleuze was – Deleuze's concepts are not simply plucked out of thin air, but rather have a purpose, a direction, a logic, and a solid grounding in the stuff of films (in what Deleuze refers to as film's 'signaletic material').

Bogue is especially adept at explaining how Deleuze adapts Henri Bergson's philosophies of the image, movement, memory and duration for constructing his cinematic concepts. Bogue explains that Deleuze's understanding of what cinema *is* is fundamentally Bergsonian, for Deleuze analyses cinema from the perspective that the universe itself is inherently cinematic. Deleuze finds in Bergson an equation between matter and light, the ramifications of which mean that, wherever we perceive light, we necessarily perceive matter; matter, the 'stuff' of the world, is composed of images, and therefore the world of matter is available to us as an 'image-world'. Of course, other perceptions are available to us — especially those of sound in the case of cinema – but Bogue stresses the point that is fundamental to Deleuze's conception of cinema: that Bergson makes no distinction between *being* and *being perceived*. This in turn means that the perceptions we have of cinema are perceptions of the world's matter: perceptions of cinematic light are equivalent to the light of the world. What Deleuze adds to Bergson is the notion that the universe itself is cinematic: 'it is the universe itself as cinema, a metacinema'.[6]

And yet, perhaps these are overly conceptual concerns. What is most important for film studies scholars – and the reason I believe Deleuze's books to be continually stimulating – is the way Bogue manages to illuminate films themselves, from the wondrous description of the heroine's reactions in Rossellini's *Europa 51* (1951), or the delicate analysis of Renoir's *The Golden Coach* (1952), through myriad other examples. Surely one mark of a great book on film is that it inspires one

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to see films (or to see them again), and Bogue's book inspired me to watch *The Golden Coach*, a film I had not previously seen. Viewing the film alongside Bogue's descriptions of it – even if the Deleuzian language specifies the existence of a 'cracked crystal-image' – genuinely makes the film come alive so as to imbue it with a significance of which one may ordinarily be unaware. Bogue describes the way that the theatrical stage in *The Golden Coach* exists in the film in terms of a logic of experimentation. By way of experimenting, the characters in the film hope to discover new ways of life, openings onto possibilities beyond their prescribed 'roles'. Theatrical roles eventually find their way into real life, such that the roles with which the characters experiment tend to become part of their real lives. And this is not simply a matter of unpacking the film's narrative, nor is it a matter of describing the film's themes, or the character's desires and motivations; rather it is a matter of describing the film's cinematic logic, that is, the way that all elements of the film work towards a logic of experimentation that aims towards an escape into a new life.

Bogue does not try to go beyond the films that Deleuze himself analyzed, and he sticks, for example, closely to Deleuze's division between classical and modern cinema. Pisters, on the other hand, wants to take Deleuzian concepts into new territories. Far from restricting her investigation to the domains of classical and modern cinema, she claims that one of the chief aims of *The Matrix of Visual Culture* is to outline some of the ways that it may be possible to 'work with Deleuze in analysing specific expressions of contemporary media culture' (p. 8). In this way, many of her analyses tend to rub up against or extend Deleuze in an attempt to make his concepts 'productive' and '"applicable" to a wide range of audiovisual images' (p. 218).

Pisters' approach is not one that necessarily relies on Deleuze's cinematic concepts. Broadly speaking, the first half of the book (chapters one to three) focuses on some terms and concepts from Deleuze's cinema books, while the second half (chapters four to six) primarily utilizes concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*.[7] The second half of the book is utterly fascinating and engaging, for it examines not just films, but a whole host of other media: video, television, novels, music. One highlight is Pisters's exploration of various iterations of *The Jungle Book* – Kipling, Korda's 1942 film, Disney's animation film (1967), Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage* (1970) – which are then linked up with Francis Bacon's crucifixion paintings, which are in turn linked to Fassbinder's *In a Year of 13 Moons* (1978), a film which furthermore takes up a significant discussion earlier in Pisters's book. The ability for Pisters to make these dizzying leaps across media, across genres, and through histories, reveals an excitement and flexibility that opens up connections between disparate entities in a way that is truly inspiring. There is a sense in which she makes the objects of her study 'come alive' and the work pulsates with a Spinozian joy.

7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

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This reader, however, cannot help having some reservations. Does 'working with Deleuze' mean 'making his concepts *applicable*'? That is, does one takes concepts out of the Deleuzian toolbox and then apply them to examples that seem to fit the bill? In *The Matrix of Visual Culture*, Pisters tends to work by way of illustrative examples, by showing the ways in which a narrative, a theme, or a character illustrates in some way a Deleuzian concept – that in Korda's *Jungle Book* the character of Mowgli demonstrates a 'becoming-animal', while in Truffaut's version the wild child exemplifies a 'becoming-human'. Such an approach, it seems to me, is contrary to the kind of approach Deleuze made, for he did not work by way of illustrative examples, but rather he worked by charting the constructions of circuits, series and flows that were generated by films, novels, philosophers, and so on. And that construction of conceptual circuits was always achieved by way of an extraordinary mixing of form and content, such that any narrative or character was somehow always conceptually linked with the formal qualities of a work – the drive for a new life in *The Golden Coach* is linked to the dazzling gold of the coach (as a feature of mise-en-scene), or the cramped nature of the characters' living quarters is contrasted with the open-air expanses of the theatrical stage, and so on. Deleuze was extraordinarily attentive to that which was filmic in films – hence his attempt to create a novel language of cinematic signs – and I cannot help feeling that Pisters downplays precisely that which is filmic in Deleuze.

So what does a book whose subtitle is *Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* make of Deleuze's cinematic concepts? On the one hand it is possible to argue that Pisters's book has the capacity to be far more valuable than Bogue's *Deleuze on Cinema*, for Bogue merely repeats Deleuze's categories and uses much the same films as Deleuze did in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. One may argue that Bogue in fact delivers nothing *new*, and surely any properly Deleuzian approach would be one that engages with conceptual novelties. To her credit, Pisters makes an attempt to break free from the rigidity of the movement-image/time-image trajectory by taking Deleuze's film theory into potentially new territories. One very interesting thesis she pursues is that some contemporary US films – *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) and *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) are the main examples – are time-images masquerading as action-images: that is, such films go beyond the categorizations of time-image or movement-image in order to play with the logics and expectations of these categories. Pisters claims that 'even in the Hollywood action-image time has made its dazzling entrance' (p. 39). In fact, Pisters argues that this is a move that is appropriate to our current age, for we have entered a metacinematic age:

According to Deleuze, who follows Bergson in his cinema books, it is through the camera that we have come to live in a universe that is metacinematic. ... In this sense, we come to understand our past,

present, and future through a new 'camera consciousness' that has entered our perception. (p. 2)

Pisters's notion of a metacinema is thus rather different from that which Bogue attributes to Deleuze. For Bogue's reading of Deleuze, metacinema is what there has always been, it just took the invention of cinema to make it clear that perception and consciousness had always been cinematic. For Pisters's Deleuze, on the other hand, metacinema is a state we have only recently entered. I certainly feel that Pisters's interpretation here is misguided, for it fundamentally alters the stakes of a Deleuzian approach to film studies. For Deleuze, as Bogue makes clear in *Deleuze on Cinema*, a metacinematic universe is not a social condition of watching movies, or an outcome of the fact that we now see so many things in a cinematic way, or that we see reality today through the eyes of the camera. Rather, cinema merely exemplifies how natural perception has always functioned. For Pisters to claim therefore that only some recent films introduce a metacinematic camera consciousness – for example, that *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) introduces a Deleuzain, metacinematic camera consciousness that was not present in the 'classic' example of Powell and Pressburger's *Peeping Tom* (1959) – is surely to misunderstand one of the fundamental tenets of Deleuze's film theory. The fact that Pisters points towards many films that are set in the future – *Blade Runner*, the *Terminator* films, *Back to the Future, Peggy Sue Got Married, Total Recall, Twelve Monkeys, Fight Club, The Fifth Element* – as being emblematic of this new metacinema is perhaps even stranger, for it seems to me to be symptomatic of what Fredric Jameson referred to as a desire to transform our own present into the past,[8] a desire here for Pisters to make it seem as though the dream of a metacinema is just ahead, just around the corner. Of course, for Deleuze, the metacinema is already here, and has always been here.

Deleuze's cinema books are complex and somewhat confusing, and it remains to be seen whether film studies really can work with Deleuze. Patricia Pisters offers one way of putting the Deleuzian challenge to film theory. She uses a range of concepts taken from across Deleuze's works, both cinematic and non-cinematic, in order to make Deleuze work with film theory. I, for one, however, am a little troubled that some fundamental aspects of Deleuze's approach to cinema have been bypassed or reinterpreted in order that these openings be made. The aims of Bogue's *Deleuze on Cinema* are somewhat different from those of Pisters's book. He remains utterly faithful to Deleuze's cinematic concepts and thus demonstrates that Deleuze's *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* are works of inestimable value for scholars of film studies.

8 Fredric Jameson, 'Progress versus utopia; or, can we imagine the future?', *Science Fiction Studies*, no. 27 (1982), pp. 147–58.

review

Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film*. London: Pavilion Books, 2004, 512 pp.

JOHN ORR

Edinburgh-based Mark Cousins is a rare commodity on the British cinema scene: an active producer and documentary maker, a press and television journalist, a genuine cinephile, a born communicator and, on the evidence on this book, one of the most knowledgeable writers on film to be found anywhere in the world. The vision here is not only historical in the deepest sense but global in the broadest sense. As world cinema expands in the mid twentieth century so does the book itself. Not only does it tell the more familiar stories of American cinema from D.W. Griffith to *The Matrix* or that of French cinema from Lumière to late Godard, it tells the story of Japanese cinema from Ozu and Mizoguchi to Nagata and Takashi, of Chinese cinema from Xie Jin to Wong Kar-Wai, of Ousmane Sembene and Youssef Chanine in the making of postcolonial African film, of the varied paths of Indian cinema from P.C. Barua's 1935 *Devda* to Mani Kaul's 1989 *Siddeshwari*, and finds time to fill in the details of all the world's new waves from France to Brazil and Czechoslovakia to Iran. In the midst of all this dazzling detail and dispersal there is a leitmotif that gives this book its vital focus, and a controversial one it is too. Cousins turns around convention by suggesting classical Hollywood cinema was in fact intensely romantic, that classicism in cinema found its true signature in Ozu and his Asian followers, especially in Taiwan, and that amidst the modernisms of all the new waves, a fourth form of cinema constantly reinvents itself, a metaphysical form engaging transcendence that he traces all the way through Dreyer to Bergman, Bresson and Tarkovsky and to the avant-garde formulae of Sokhurov, Béla Tarr, Lars Von Trier and Bruno Dumont.

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This vivid history of film also contains, then, a critique of film. That in fact makes up its 'story' of film, a narrative that entwines the two and that is so varied in scope and so enchanting in execution it literally opens up the world of film to anyone and everyone. It is an extraordinary achievement that provokes admiration and controversy in equal part. Its narrative is so condensed and yet so expansive that the effect is breathtaking. His implicit repudiation of Bordwell's model of classical cinema extends to rejecting Hollywood genre as the core of his story. Instead of an Americocentric view of popular cinema as a set of variations, around the world, on genres that originate in the Hollywood studios, Cousins adapts the model of art evolution used by E.H. Gombrich, 'schema plus correction', to forge a global model of what he calls 'schema plus variation'. Narrative and stylistic models of filmmaking can originate anywhere in the world and be transformed anywhere else in the world. Of course Cousins recognizes the durability of national cinemas, where schema plus variation is usually stronger within national boundaries than across them. But transnational variations can occur anywhere, at any time and any place. The forcing of the pace is accorded to key avant gardes: the Soviet think-tank of Kuleshov in the 1920s, the *Cahiers* group in 1950s Paris and, more modestly, the manifesto for low-budget cinema proclaimed in the Danish Dogme 95 that had such a big impact at the start of the digital age. Cousins notes that attention-seeking proclamations about how film ought to proceed were not only statements of principle, but shrewd tactics to gain funding for new kinds of film when none seemed available. In a way, the impact of all three movements went around the world.

If we change direction and look more closely at Cousins's most controversial claim – that Studio Hollywood cranked up an aesthetic of 'closed romantic realism' while true classicism reached its zenith in Ozu's postwar films – we can see that Ozu's intimate family dramas did operate through his use of the static shot and attention to everyday detail, an aesthetic of composure, balance and harmony. Cousins attributes this to an auteurist 'workshop' system in prewar Japan, in which Ozu, Naruse and Mizoguchi had all thrived and where silent classics were being produced long after Hollywood turned to sound. Classical cinema for Cousins means balance, harmony, restraint and attention to the details of everyday life. Hollywood meanwhile was intensely romantic in its sensibility. *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) 'created such a vivid, emotional universe and lush, sonic and visual experience', Cousins contends, 'that the film's bitter message was somehow smothered' (p. 169). His case for the genre system as dominated by the structures of romance is telling. His reason, however, for calling it 'closed', that is never reflexive or self-conscious, seems superfluous, a statement of the obvious. Moreover the rationale for calling it 'realist', by creating stories about characters as fallible humans in identifiable social settings, seems shaky. In Hollywood the star system had from the start led to rampant idealization of heroes and heroines that were

larger than life. With the exception of films like *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940) or *Shadow of a Doubt* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1943), social setting in most studio products up to 1950 is usually vague and constrained by censorship. A better term for the dominant form of the studio period is the *romance melodrama*, in which the broader struggle of good against evil is matched by the changing fortunes of personal romance, and re-sources of course the seductive lure of the American Dream. Cousins shrewdly points out that film noir is the antidote here, a prickly thorn in the studio's side. Largely the product of European emigres, it is caustic about melodrama and romance, and deeply so. Yet at the time noir remained peripheral, never the cult form that it is now. The homeboy who proved to be even more caustic and went one step further than Wilder and Siodmak was the renegade American Orson Welles. Cousins gives him his due with homage to his deep-focus and wide-angle innovations in style. Yet as early as 1946 (the date of completion) *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) had not only poured bitter scorn on all studio romance but also funnelled melodrama through the Brechtian mincer. No wonder that it became one of Godard's biggest influences. Even in the bastardized form of a final cut that Welles hated, it is the *ur*-text of film modernism.

External challenges to Hollywood came from Europe, first through neorealism and then the blistering innovations of the French new wave. On the Italian front Cousins is ambivalent. He credits neorealism with dedramatization, though really Antonioni forges it a decade later, but he also echoes 1970s Italian critics who found it too melodramatic and compromised by links to prewar fascism. It cannot really be both. A better solution might be to treat the films of Rossellini, Visconti and De Santis as forms of *romantic realism* that explore new social worlds, undercut the moral stereotypes of Hollywood melodrama through psychosexual complexity, but still retain a romantic impulse that longs to fuse personal and social happiness. This form of neorealism is then taken back onto US territory where it inflects the 1950s films of Elia Kazan and Nicholas Ray, socially and sexually specific, but also highly romantic. Here it is Hitchcock, of all people, who having queried the romance melodrama from the inside for so many years dramatically breaks the frame in a series of late films, starting with *The Wrong Man* (1956) and ending with *Marnie* (1964). It could be argued that the romance melodrama, subsequently diluted by Hollywood into a minor genre of knowing 'rom-coms', is then codified elsewhere in a big way, in the new expanding studio system of Bollywood, where the take on genre is completely different, where song, dance, romance and warrior epic are all intermingled. It is a point Cousins mostly ignores because he wants to stress how much that is good about Indian cinema does not conform to the Hindi/Bollywood model at all. He also points that in the 1980s Madras overtook Mumbai (Bombay) in studio output by working on the warrior-spectacle where romance has little look-in at all.

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Care also has to be taken about what Cousins calls 'the exploded story' of how modernisms helped to foment the breakdown of romantic cinema. Cousins avoids the trap of ascribing everything to the French new wave: he gives as much space to Leone, Rocha (the two romantic modernists of the Western), Iran's documentary innovator Farough Farrokhzad, and Imamura (but not Oshima) as he does to Truffaut and Godard (themselves tortured romantics in the early 1960s). New American cinema gets most space of all, though he starts not with *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) but with *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Shadows* (Joha Cassavetes, 1959) as new forms of pared-down innovation, before dwelling in detail on the story of the 1970s. The late-1970s return to big-budget escapism and the renewal of the Hollywood studios is thankfully not framed in terms of the idiot Biskind syndrome – auteurs self-destructing through sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll – but ingeniously through the transformation of Kurosawa by Spielberg and George Lucas in their sci-fi blockbusters. Kurosawa of course had influenced the new Hollywood Western of the 1960s, but the takeover of his warrior motifs into *Star Wars* marked the beginnings of a box-office science fiction aided by advances in computerized cameras and special effects. Cousins could have added that *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) is also inconceivable without Kurosawa's genius for the action sequence mise-en-scene. But he does note the blunt irony of it all: Kurosawa was so down on his luck in 1980 he had to rely on his western imitators Lucas and Coppola to fund *Kagemusha*.

On the metaphysics of film the story is fascinating to start with but then stalls, because of the Big Question that cannot be answered in any one book: how religious and metaphysical forms that predate film come to leave such major traces on its course. Cousins talks in passing of Dreyer and Protestantism or *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) and Daoism, for instance, but the story goes much wider and has never been fully told. One thing is clear: 'metaphysics' can never be ripped free of its religious sources in any culture, but how it inflects film narrative remains a fascinating, at times inscrutable, puzzle.

Atheists and postmodernists can take no comfort from the fact that metaphysics do not go away, but recur throughout cinema history. By contrast, the postmoderns of the digital age seem high on ingenuity and low on substance. One of the key crossover points between East and West in recent box-office cinema noted by Cousins is *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), which married the 'wire-fu' techniques of Hong Kong action pictures to the digital fluidity of 'fly arounds' made possible by computer generated imagery (CGI). The film is a technical tour de force whose sense of spectacle makes pastiche postmodernism pale in comparison. Its use of future parable is weak, however, compared with the warrior-history fable of Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), where the power of wire-fu is taken in the opposite direction, its effects fused with the astonishing landscape photography of Christopher Doyle.

As for upmarket pastiche, Cousins praises the talents of Tarantino, Stone and the Coen Brothers but overplays his hand, ending up in *The Guardian* comfort zone by having them down as key texts of the postmodern instead of seeing their films for what they are, cute and ingenious variations on US genre with little story to tell. The Coens' best film *Fargo* (1996) gets no mention, and little space after *Blue Velvet* (1986) is given to David Lynch, whose films no one can second-guess. Strangely, Lynch does not feature in the 1990s section, but if the Americans have produced a genuine rival to all the present filmmakers elsewhere that Cousins admires – Kiarostami, Sokhurov, Von Trier, Béla Tarr and the Dardenne brothers – it is surely him. But this has to be a minor quibble. The current polyvalence of global film is so great that to give it due recognition, Cousins has to make every key text come to life in a matter of two paragraphs, to provide not only the story of film, but the story of *each* film that he values highly. His great success in doing so is no mean achievement.

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Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, 327 pp.

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

Film noir remains an object of scholarly fascination for the reason that it haunts our cultural imagination. As Edward Dimendberg argues in the opening pages of his groundbreaking overview of the intersection between noir and the shifting topographies of America's postwar urban landscape, it can also resonate with one's personal reading of the material coordinates of city space to an unsettling degree. Just as film noir remains preoccupied 'with traumas of unrecoverable time and space, the inability to dwell comfortably either in the present or the past', he writes: 'I also have been unable to remember and just as unable to forget, touched by a body of films that today still colors my memories and experiences of urban space' (p. 1).

This conjuring of spatial *and* temporal elements is apt for a mode of US filmmaking which, in itself, is notoriously unstable due to its original constitution as a retrospective form of discourse devised by French critics looking back at a recent body of Hollywood films in the immediate years following World War II. As many would argue, any considered account of the noir cycle must take into consideration 'an amalgam of diverse historical and cultural elements' (p. 3), which may include the distinctive and varied relationships between exiled European filmmakers and the Hollywood system, uneven but visible links between the conventional noir corpus and earlier forms of filmmaking such as French poetic realism, the Weimar street film and the socially conscious American urban detective and gangster cinemas of the 1930s, as well as a host of intertextual references from photographers such as Esther Bubbley to novelists like James M. Cain and, of course, Raymond Chandler.[1] What remains noteworthy about Dimendberg's intervention is

1 For recent work in this field, see Paula Rabinowitz, *Black & White and Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002); Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema Between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000); James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

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the way that he acknowledges these critical strands – often by having something new to say about them – but, at the same time, he also brings into play a range of new paradigms and sources from which to view the determinedly uneven chronology of film noir.

Dimendberg's central thesis is that this chronology remains uneven not because of the vexed and ultimately irreducible arguments about the stylistic origins of the cycle. Indeed, for a book on film noir, this title has remarkably little to say about the common discursive threads of moody and threatening lighting, distorted camera angles and so on. So whilst arguing that the cycle may best be understood as 'a historically circumscribed group of films sharing common industrial practices, stylistic features, narrative consistencies, and spatial representations' (p. 11), Dimendberg also posits that the 'nonsynchronous character of film noir' may be 'best apprehended as a tension between a residual US culture and urbanism of the 1920s and 1930s and its liquidation by the technological and social innovations accompanying World War II' (p. 3). He further suggests that 'the simulacra and spectacles of contemporary postmodern culture are clearly visible in retrospect' in 'the simultaneous dissolution of this new social compact of the 1940s and 1950s by the society emerging in the 1960s' (p. 3). In other words, the book sets about describing a fundamental shift in the social landscape of the USA through the lens of a cinema uniquely disposed to describe that transformation because its narratives visualized, in both a material and sensory fashion, the impression of what it was like to live in that world at that time. Dimendberg's repeated use of the formulation 'films noir' reveals both how plural and unstable this process was in the course of the years between the mid 1940s and the late 1950s.

Not that several elements of this thesis are radically new in themselves. One of the most interesting ways in which the book operates is the means by which Dimendberg situates his larger arguments within the framework of contemporaneous period discourses about the cinema, the city and the fabric of urban experience. Citing Nino Frank's now canonical 1946 essay on the genre in *L'Ecran Français*,[2] he reminds us, for example, that what appealed to the French critic in the early phase of 'films noir' was the sensation of 'the impression of real life, of lived experience' (p. 5). How was this impression created? On the one hand, one could turn to the ways in which chance, coincidence or the contingency of urban experience became reiterated in the construction of the narration. Dimendberg recalls earlier voices such as Siegfried Kracauer on the analogies between the construction of cinematic space and time and the experiential aspects of the phenomenon of modern urban life by reminding us that 'The properly cinematic object for Kracauer maintains contact with the surface of physical reality while simultaneously inducing psychophysical correspondences' (p. 133). He has many interesting things to say about the intersection between elements of modernist and mass-market photography (for example, Andreas Feininger and Weegee) and the evocation of city space

in film. There are also the ways in which noir seemingly related directly to the anxieties about anonymity and commodification in mass society articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre in an article published after a visit to Los Angeles. Sartre noted that the invisible presence of the millions of people 'makes of everyone *both* a polyvalent isolation ... *and* an *integrated* member of the city' (p. 61).

This tension between segregation and integration is significant for it evokes the 'simultaneous centralizing *and* decentralizing consequences of new communication and transportation technologies' (p. 101), which Dimendberg sees as critical to the ways in which noir engaged with the world. Hitherto marginalized and evocatively titled noirs such as *The Crooked Way* (Robert Florey, 1949), *The Window* (Ted Tetzlaff, 1949), *The Street With No Name* (William Keighley, 1948), *He Walked By Night* (Alfred Werker, 1948), *The City That Never Sleeps* (John H. Auer, 1953), *Johnny One Eye* (Robert Florey, 1950), *Street of Chance* (Jack Hively, 1942), *Footsteps in the Night* (Jean Yarbrough, 1957) and *The Killer is Loose* (Budd Boetticher, 1955) are called up to suggest equivalences between generically coded screen space and the material consequences of US modernity in the 1940s and 1950s. If Dimendberg posits an almost tacit collusion between these two sites – at one point early on in the book, he actually makes the assertion that 'film noir can be both a symptom and a catalyst of spatial transformation' (p. 12) – how is this best theorized and categorized? The book turns to the suggestive interpretative principles underlying Henri Lefebvre's work on urban sociology, especially his engagement with the notions of centripetal and centrifugal space. Dimendberg's core aim here is to argue that film noir 'does not so much "represent" Lefebvre's concepts ... as realize them in cinematic form' (p. 108).

Central to the author's reading of Lefebvre is the assumption that US film noir's representation of the city relates to the notion of 'abstract space' in which earlier, more easily blurred forms of urban public space were in the process of being replaced with something more separated and commodified. The corpus of the cycle makes visible how 'traditional relations of production and connections to nature' (p. 106) were being subsumed by 'an increasingly mediated mode of spatiality' (p. 106). How can the critic best discern this shift? Dimendberg deploys Lefebvre's slightly confusing and overlapping notions of 'spatial practice', 'representation of space' and 'space of representation' in an attempt to try and chart a model for further analysis. The former engages with the complex question of social organization, in particular the issues raised by class, age and gender relations in the city. Several of these topics have dominated much noir criticism over the years, but Dimendberg tends to refer to them, for example, in relation to more mobile but slightly diffuse ideas such as the notion of 'walking through a densely populated city where characters experience meetings ranging from the familiar to the unexpected' (p. 105). He observes that in earlier noir films such as *Criss Cross* (Robert Siodmak, 1949) and *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang,

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1946) the 'citydweller's life is frequently divided between several locations – public and private – that serve as meeting points and places of conflict' (p. 105). Later on in the book, however, Dimendberg is especially acute in employing Lefebvre's idea of 'spatial practice' when it comes to the transformation of social relations determined by the development of new housing and road networks in postwar America. Here he provides innovative and revealing analyses of how the changing fabric of US society became imbricated within the noir narratives of films such as the hitherto undervalued *Plunder Road* (Hubert Cornfield, 1957).

Lefebvre's idea of 'representation of space' is employed with some effect to evoke the cognitive, conceptual and ideological principles that inhabit the construction of the city spaces as they are especially found in film noir. Although one could argue that many of the elements harnessed in these discussions may be found in other US film genres such as the gangster film, melodrama and even the musical, Dimendberg is right to stress the particularly powerful social tensions, for example, that lie behind noir's recurrent deployment of windows, doorways and street grids with their concurrent notions of horizontal or vertical and exterior or interior spatial relations. Perhaps the least contentious of Lefebvre's three categories is that of 'space of representation', since an insistence on the cultural practice of particular atmospheric visual tropes, such as the city's skyline and the darkened street, points to the important mythologizing process that has led so many people to the cycle over the years. It is to Dimendberg's credit that he does not dissuade the reader of the imaginative force of film noir, rather he consistently shines new and revealing light on aspects within the film frame that had always been visible, but never fully contextualized.

Dimendberg's contextual work then is largely achieved by constructing the book around the twin ideas of centripetal and centrifugal space. The former suggests the idea of a centralized cityscape readily connected to the dominant representational history of US film noir: the vernacular elements of the 'railroad stations, department stores and commercial buildings', as well as the 'skyscraper, the jazz nightclub, the magazine or newspaper office, the bus terminal, the diner, the automobile [and] the traffic-congested street' (p. 25). Dimendberg's point is that film noir did not just realize these social and architectural environments in cinematic form, it also conveyed 'a range of attitudes, behaviors, and shared interpretations' connected to contemporaneous 'developments in architecture, urbanism and technology' (p. 99). Thus, these spaces were especially marked by a kind of lament – a sensibility which recognized that the earlier lyrical allure and utopian promise of US modernism (as pictured, for example, in the photography of Berenice Abbott and others) had been displaced by the dehumanizing homogeneity of 'abstract space'. A seminal film like Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948) is analyzed at length to suggest that it visibly captured parts of New York on the brink of this social and cultural transformation. Dimendberg's

detailed reading of *Johnny One Eye* is also exemplary for its treatment of the emotional consequences of the historical tensions between horizontal and vertical axes of spatial representation apparent in the film's depiction of the area lying between midtown and Greenwich Village. Similarly, the book suggests that the 'trauma and amnesia experienced' by the lead character in *Street of Chance* serves 'as a powerful allegory for the disappearance of familiar architectural landmarks' apparent in many New York City neighbourhoods from 1940 onwards. It also comments effectively on noir's charting of the decline of that part of Los Angeles known as Bunker Hill – a district that also featured in Thom Anderson's recent illuminating documentary on the history of cinematic representations of the city, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003).

Central to Dimendberg's discussion of centripetal urban space is the question of surveillance and detection, since it is evidently also analogous to the narrative strategies of many films noirs themselves. The author looks at Walter Benjamin's conclusion that 'the original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd' (p. 26) to argue that in the case of US film noir, the very recording activity of the camera often resulted in something more disparate and fragmented. A film like *Phantom Lady* (Robert Siodmak, 1944) was indeed involved with the traces of the individual within the city, but from the vantage point of competing power relations struggling to achieve a single controlling gaze over the urban domain. Thus, we see that one of the key ideological strands of the film noir cycle consists of what might be called 'an incessant struggle between perceptual indifference and engaged congnition' (p. 31). In other words, film noir may, in fact, have often created an urban space that was interestingly 'neither ... too anonymous nor too visible' (p. 36).

This effort to contain and recognize the city by visual means may be linked to anatomical discourses of the centripetal city in which the body of 'the metropolis appears as an interstitial supplement to detection, surveyed no less than its wrongdoers and criminals' (p. 22). It also accounts for the familiar trope of the journalistic voice audible in the proliferation of the police procedural noir in the late 1940s. Dimendberg argues that these particular films were not just about technology and documentary style, they also consisted of the idea of 'a shared frame of reference' (p. 67) in order to 'restore an experience of place to an urban realm becoming increasingly homogenized through abstract space' (pp. 67–8). Worst of all perhaps, though also more contentious, is the idea that the grandiose aerial cityscape openings popularized in US noirs such as *Criss Cross* actually point to a 'growing cultural anxiety that the city has been eclipsed' (p. 89).

A pervasive anxiety about disappearance is certainly germane to the book's ensuing discussion about the tensions between the representation of centripetal and centrifugal space within the film noir cycle. Dimendberg argues persuasively that

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while both centripetal and centrifugal films noir spaces manifest traits of abstract space, each reveals distinct modalities of urban anxiety. For if the former elicits the agoraphobic sensation of being overwhelmed by space, fears of constriction, or the fear of losing one's way in the metropolis, is fundamental legibility can generally be assumed. ... By contrast, the anxieties provoked by centrifugal space hinge upon temporality and the uncertainty produced by a spatial environment increasingly devoid of landmarks and centers and often likely to seem permanently in motion. (pp. 171–2)

Futhermore,

centrifugal spaces should not be construed as incompatible with centripetal space, for many elements of the built environment reveal both. ... At stake in the distinction are not fixed identities or pure types but shifting terms and oppositions between center and periphery with corresponding forms of culture and subjectivity. (p. 177)

Given these assertions, it is not surprising that much of the ensuing analysis of the centripetal film noir is centred around the city of Los Angeles, beginning with a telling discussion of the relationships between the geographical and cultural landscape of Southern California and the work of Raymond Chandler. Dimendberg then goes on to argue that although it never entirely disappeared in film noir, centripetal space lost its dominance towards the end of the 1940s to the extent that films with a firm sense of place, such as *Phantom Lady* and *Dark Corner* (Henry Hathaway, 1946), became increasingly displaced by titles such as *On Dangerous Ground* (Nicholas Ray, 1952) and *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950). Even though early noir commentators such as Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton argued for a renewed sense of the city with the postwar rise in location cinematography,[3] Dimendberg points out that this was also matched by the growing representational significance of such spaces as 'suburban settlements, industrial landscapes, shopping malls [and] conurbations' (p. 176). In other words, in contradistinction to other formative accounts of the phenomenon, 'changes in film technology or economics are insufficient to explain spatial transformations in the film noir cycle and their cultural significance' (p. 211).

Having therefore adjusted one's reading of Borde and Chaumeton, Dimendberg also revisits their retrospective observation that noir began to fall into decline after the key year of 1949, with the advent of a greater degree of stylistic realism and the absorption of its distinctive narrative patterns and concerns into other series of films. He argues that rather than this being the case, a shift occurred that may well have had as much to do with such contextual factors as the enactment of new housing and transport legislation and the dramatic rise in television ownership as anything intrinsic to industry concerns. Certainly, there was a new apprehension of spatial relations clearly visible in films made that year

3 See Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir américain* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955), translated by Paul Hammond as *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941–1953* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2002).

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such as *Thieves Highway* (Jules Dassin) and *White Heat* (Raoul Walsh). Central to both was the representation of the highway, which Dimendberg suggests 'may well be the preeminent centrifugal space of the twentieth century' (p. 181). Even though cinematic representations of the motorway were 'Arguably as significant to post-1930 cinema as the street and the railroad were to ... earlier films engaged in charting a centralized and navigable centripetal space', he points out that they 'remain far less studied than filmic treatments of the metropolis' (pp. 181–2).

Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity attempts to adjust this deficit by the inclusion of some striking analyses of new films to the film noir canon such as the aforementioned *Plunder Road*, which Dimendberg reads as a forceful allegory of the creation of the interstate highway system: 'Few works of cinema more forcefully propose the analogy between driving, cinema and criminality', he states (p. 198). The book also offers fascinating names to conjure with, such as the figure of Norman Bel Geddes, the motorway lobbyist and advocate of European modernist trends in architecture, design and city planning who was also a knowledgeable cinephile and theatre designer. Dimendberg also introduced me to the work of A.I. Bezzerides, the truck driver turned scriptwriter and novelist who wrote the original novels on which *They Drive By Night* (Raoul Walsh, 1940) and *Thieves Highway* were based, as well as the screenplays for such seminal centrifugal film noirs as *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955) and *On Dangerous Ground.*

Dimendberg pursues the idea of spatial mobility in his subsequent discussion of the ways in which media technologies such as radio and television compensated in his view for the increasing diffuseness of the postwar American urban landscape. Both visible and audible in a number of prominent noirs of the period, he suggests that radio, for example, sped up 'the circulation of information, [overcame] spatial separation, and [promoted] decentralization – three of the tendencies I discern in centrifugal space' (p. 217). In an idea which relates to later televised narratives of criminal wrongdoing such as the infamous police chase of O.J. Simpson in the 1990s, simultaneity in centripetal noir's incorporation of the mass media can often best be understood as 'the convergence of three separate events: the activity of an agent or an event (a fugitive on the run, a traffic accident); the narrativization and broadcasting of this activity as an event by a media source; and the reception of this narrative by a listener or spectator' (p. 217). Dimendberg develops this analysis by also turning to hitherto under-discussed films such as *The Killer is Loose* and *Murder By Contract* (Irving Lerner, 1958) in order to examine the new cultural realities of the intersection between television and suburban domestic space.

It is clear that this important volume makes a seminal contribution to ongoing critical debates on film noir and its continuing significance to the study of US popular film culture. The best of the book is on par with James Naremore's insightful readings of films like *Double Indemnity*

4 Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

(Billy Wilder, 1944) and *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) and of Tom Gunning's recent work on Fritz Lang.[4] It broadens the field considerably by introducing new vocabularies of thought and applying them to newly prominent films. Dimendberg's assertive correlation between the film text, spatial theory and various cultural histories concerning urban planning, photography, architecture and sociology point to new and valuable ways of inserting the study of US film within the wider terrain of US society. If, at times, there are slightly unresolved claims which prefer to contain discussion away from more rigorous and testing application against specific examples from the corpus of film noir, there are more than enough cases when the textual readings seem observant, telling and innovative. One area which is fleetingly analyzed, but remains up for further and more persistent investigation, is the potential spatiality of the *acoustics* of the cycle, especially in terms of the interaction between music and moving image and the links that could be drawn between indexical, quite sensory, elements of the noir soundscape, the various topographies of the urban environment and the narrative concerns of the films. I was also struck by the restrictive conception of the film audience in the USA at a time when it was of, course, more stratified and geographically diverse than just the hegemonic spaces of Los Angeles and New York City. But that said, this is undoubtedly a well-argued and convincing book which is also, not coincidentally, beautifully illustrated. At a time, at least in the UK environment, of reduced deadlines and condensed research schedules, it is pleasing to read an academic book which is so evidently the product of a long period of gestation and commendably meticulous reading.

review

Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism and American Culture.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003, 305 pp.

WILLIAM BODDY

The political blacklist and the rise of commercial television, the twin
subjects of Thomas Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television,
McCarthyism and American Culture*, are hardly unfamiliar to even
casual students of US history. Indeed, as Doherty notes near the end of
his book, subsequent generations of Hollywood filmmakers (and
television producers) have revisited the historical trauma of
McCarthyism 'with a frequency bordering on obsession-compulsion'
(p. 253). Nevertheless, if Doherty's broad topics are familiar, there is
value in his medium-specific perspective on the rise and fall of the anti-
Communist crusade of the junior senator from Wisconsin. Though not
without flaws, his book delivers a rich and well-informed narrative
intertwining the fortunes of the new television medium with the
spectacular career of one of its first political stars.

At the centre of Doherty's book are two chapter-length set pieces
detailing two epochal television events from 1954: the celebrated attack
on the methods of Senator Joseph McCarthy by venerated CBS newsman
Edward R. Murrow on *See It Now*, and the extended live television
coverage of the Army–McCarthy hearings which began the following
month. These hearings, culminating in the famous outraged query to the
Senator from the Army's outside counsel Joseph N. Welch, 'Have you
no sense of decency, sir, at long last?', cemented McCarthy's rapid
political downfall. Though richly detailed and intrinsically compelling,
Doherty's treatment of these two episodes, already conspicuously
covered in the histories of US politics and media, offers little to contest or
extend prevailing understandings of the events. For example, though
Doherty begins his chapter on the Murrow broadcasts with expressions of

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scepticism about how their iconic significance had 'congealed into a kind of journalistic creation myth' around 'the patron saint of broadcast journalism' (p. 160), he concludes the chapter nearly thirty pages later by endorsing the familiar hagiographic view of Murrow as television's 'white knight', 'ever after ... a journalistic byword for class, courage, and integrity' (p. 188). In place of revisionist polemic, Doherty pumps up the two narrative centrepieces with an array of dramatic devices, including the setting out of speeches from both Murrow and Welch as pages of free verse. Indeed, though highly readable, Doherty's writing here and elsewhere occasionally strives too hard for literary effect, with dramatic showdowns and extended character sketches at the expense of more context and analysis.

If the well-trod terrain of the Murrow broadcasts and Army–McCarthy hearings yields few surprises, there is richer material in some of the less-traveled areas explored in *Cold War, Cool Medium*. The book profits enormously from the wide range of topics Doherty takes on, including the contrasting paths of the political blacklist through the casts of the 1950s situation comedies *The Goldbergs* and *I Love Lucy*, the inauguration of the 1952 Television Code of censorship, the lively political discussions in Sunday-morning network public-affairs chat shows, and the widely viewed but largely forgotten Kefauver Crime Committee hearings of 1951. Similarly, the concluding chapters on homosexuality, television and anticommunism and on the end of the blacklist and its subsequent treatment in film and television contain valuable insights, though both subjects certainly invite more extended treatment. Along the way, Doherty underscores a number of stark events and delicious ironies, including the uncredited contributions of several blacklisted writers to the syndicated anticommunist action-adventure series *I Led Three Lives* (1953–6), and the still routine process of political clearance endured by cast members of the 1964 'Blacklist' episode of CBS's courtroom drama *The Defenders*, a programme subsequently celebrated as a symbol of the blacklist's declining power. In addition, Doherty's adept readings of Hollywood filmmaking of the period, and his sensitivity to issues of film and television style generally, are noteworthy; it is refreshing to encounter a work of television history which is not blind to contemporaneous film culture and tone-deaf to questions of aesthetic style.

The overlapping but largely autonomous secondary writings on early television and McCarthyism are each voluminous, and Doherty generally makes good use of this scholarly material, despite a few blind spots. *Cold War, Cool Medium* could occasionally profit from a consideration of more specialized historical work on the medium, challenging, for example, Doherty's claim that 'television took off as soon as VJ Day sounded the starting gun for the postwar boom in consumer spending' (p. 4). As a number of trade press accounts from the time pointed out, the initial postwar commercial fortunes of the new medium were clouded by regulatory and marketing uncertainties; only

1 US Congress, Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Hearings: Development of Television*, 76th Congress, third session (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1940), p. 11; 'Television: a case of war neurosis', *Fortune* (February 1946), p. 107, warned that 'television could conceivably turn into the biggest and costliest flop in US industrial history'.

2 On the FCC scandals, see Sterling Quinlan, *The Hundred Million Dollar Lunch* (Chicago, IL: J. Philip O'Hara, 1974); Bernard Schwartz, *The Professor and the Commissions* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); David A. Frier, *Conflict of Interest in the Eisenhower Administration* (Ames, IO: Iowa State University Press, 1969); US Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign and Interstate Commerce, *Appointments to the Regulatory Commissions: The FCC and FTC, 1949–74*, Committee Print, James M. Graham and Victor H. Kramer, *Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce*, 94th Congress, second session, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976).

3 Joel Foreman (ed.), *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

6500 sets were sold in 1946, and the new medium did not begin its period of genuine growth until the first quarter of 1947.[1] In addition, Doherty's discussion of the Federal Communications Commission in the 1950s might have been enhanced by considering the substantial secondary literature on the systematic pattern of corruption in what one former Commissioner called 'the whorehouse era' of that body. Indeed after the resignation and criminal conviction of another Commissioner on bribery charges, Commission chairman John Doerfer, a McCarthy protege discussed by Doherty, was forced by President Eisenhower to resign amidst a flurry of fraud and conflict-of-interest charges.[2] Though *Cold War, Cool Medium* often engages effectively with the historical literature and makes productive use of the trade press and congressional record of the period, there is still a measure of unexamined received wisdom which blunts the power of its intervention. Likewise, the echoes of the ideas of Marshall McLuhan and his 1963 book *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* in the title and body of Doherty's monograph remain conventional and mostly superficial, given Doherty's claims (pp. 246–7) for their influence and brilliance.

In addition to its occasional historiographic blind spots, *Cold War, Cool Medium* offers a sometimes awkward mixture of description and polemic. Like many of the contributors to the 1997 anthology *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (cited in *Cold War, Cool Medium*), Doherty repeatedly argues against what he sees as the traditional one-dimensional account of the decade and the television medium as politically quiescent and culturally conformist.[3] While Doherty is often convincing here, especially in his examination of the neglected record of Sunday morning public affairs programmes, there is sometimes the sense of straw men being set up, since the notion of an era or medium perfectly devoid of political contestation or sexual turmoil is not worth proposing. Indeed, at several points in the manuscript Doherty acknowledges the specific conservative contexts of the era and the television medium. In any event, the reader is sometimes left with a 'glass half-full/half-empty' conundrum, unable to weigh the status of Doherty's enumerated moments of oppositional television voices against the acknowledged widespread pattern of conformism and intimidation. While to an extent this is an empirical question – how did the number and prominence of such oppositional voices in US television compare to those in newspapers, movies and on the stage at the time? – it also points to the historiographic challenge of addressing questions of self-censorship and institutional exclusion.

Both the strong claims Doherty makes for the general progressive role of television in the 1950s ('During the Cold War, through television, America became a more open and tolerant place' [p. 2]), and more specific claims for the medium's role in improving race relations ('television in the 1950s ran far ahead of the tolerance curve' [p. 73]), while useful in challenging constricted popular notions of the medium and the period, remain highly debatable. In particular, his valorization of

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the limited number of non-stereotyped representations of African-Americans in 1950s variety shows and anthology dramas needs to be more explicitly balanced against the omissions and racist depictions which also characterized the medium at the time. In addition, Doherty seems occasionally to collapse the specific experience of race and television in America's Deep South of the era with that of the entire nation. Likewise, Doherty's introduction to his account of efforts by African-Americans to get the offensive sitcom *Amos 'n Andy* off the air labours unconvincingly to make an ethical analogy between these efforts and the political blacklist which proscribed professional employment based on an individual's political beliefs.

In re-addressing US television in the 1950s, Doherty's inevitable, and largely implicit, foil is Erik Barnouw ('indispensable historian of American broadcasting' [p 3]), whose three-volume history of US broadcasting similarly highlights the relations between political life and the new medium of television. Indeed, Barnouw traces much of the same terrain as Doherty, from the earliest use of the medium by US presidents, the rise and fall of the political blacklist, and the televised confrontations between Senator McCarthy and Edward Murrow and Joseph Welch. Unlike Barnouw's unswerving defence of McCarthy's assorted targets, however, Doherty is more concerned with separating the experiences of former Communist Party members from those of fellow travellers and liberal opponents of blacklisting. The preface of Doherty's book ends with what he calls 'a necessary gesture of self-identification' and echo of the Cold War liberal credo: 'I believe it is not mutually excusive to conclude that Soviet communism posed a menace to human freedom and that Joseph R. McCarthy was a scoundrel' (p. viii). Despite the largely non-tendentious tone of *Cold War, Cool Medium*, at times Doherty seems inclined to settle a few ideological scores, including lamenting the 1972 Academy Award tribute to Lillian Hellman: 'It wasn't that all was forgiven of the unrepentant Stalinist; it was Hollywood that asked to be forgiven for blacklisting her' (p. 253). Such unhelpful occasional *ad homonim* gestures aside, Doherty's book is a lively and informative tour of the contours of an increasingly alien landscape, as the era of US network broadcast television fades in popular memory and political potency.

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Colin MacCabe, *Jean-Luc Godard: a Portrait of the Artist at 70*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003, 432 pp.
Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, 342 pp.
Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville: an American in Paris*. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 278 pp.

SUE HARRIS

1   Eric Leguèbe, *Confessions: Un siècle de cinéma par ceux qui l'ont fait* (Paris: Ifrane Editions, 1995), p. 7.

Eric Leguèbe's description of French cinema as 'a succession of *new waves*'[1] evokes both the totemic power of late 1950s filmmaking to French criticism, as well as French cinema's enviable capacity to reinvent itself with impressive regularity. Half a century after its creative explosion onto Parisian screens, the *nouvelle vague*, and the career trajectories of those who moved within its orbit, continue to intrigue scholars. But fascination with a period in history that has been so comprehensively mapped, canonized and archived, brings its own problems, not least the suspicion that there may be precious little scope left for new insights and conclusions. It is a relief, then, to find two recent books that offer precisely that, and a solid third that reminds us why we might still be interested in the first place. Although the studies in question are vastly different in scope and intention, together they offer a timely and engaging analysis of the new wave's anchoring function in the broader currents of postwar French filmmaking. Accounting for both those who thrived as new-wave darlings, and those who were brutally eclipsed by its critical weight and voguishness, the authors successfully break down the sense of monumentality that has so inflected most readings of this period. By drawing us back into the pre- and post-history of the era, and engaging with it as mutable context rather than immovable edifice, they succeed in refiguring the new wave as a point in

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a map: a fork in the road, with the real interest lying in the various highways, paths and hidden trails that lead to and from it.

Colin MacCabe and Ginette Vincendeau play to their authoritative strengths with detailed portraits of the two postwar figures that best illustrate the consequences of forging artistic agendas in the light – but also the shadow – of the new wave juggernaut. Uncovering with precision, reliability and considerable affection the careers of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Melville respectively, the authors amply demonstrate the point made elsewhere by historian Richard Neupert that the new wave years were of longer duration and much less coherence than has been generally asserted, and that any full understanding of its shape and effects necessitates an investigation beyond the golden years of 1958–62. While Neupert's own attempts to address this result in a routine reappraisal of the early work of pioneers like Alexandre Astruc, Agnès Varda, Roger Vadim and Melville himself, MacCabe and Vincendeau's in-depth studies allow us fully to appreciate what is at stake in such a claim. We may need no reminding that Godard's cinematic project found its fullest expression outside the aesthetic confines and ideological void of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group, or that Melville's cult following among contemporary directors such as John Woo and Quentin Tarantino is entirely at odds with his labelling as old-fashioned and classicist by the same group. Yet the stories of these two figures provide an excellent insight into the complexity of filmmaking, ideas and positions that characterized the longer era. The elucidation of their contrasting roles in formulating the new artistic agenda of the 1950s and 1960s, and their respective contributions, as both prodigal son and estranged father of the movement at the centre of it, merit the clarification and extensive attention afforded here.

A first English-language study of the work of Jean-Pierre Melville can only be welcomed by film scholars; one of the rare examples of a home-grown talent whose influence has been felt beyond the borders of mainland France, Melville's extensive and varied body of work has so far failed to attract the scholarly attention it deserves. Vincendeau's *Jean-Pierre Melville: an American in Paris*, although not chronologically structured, clearly sets out the main stages of the director's uneven career: he first came to public attention in 1949 with an atmospheric adaptation of Vercors's resistance classic *Le Silence de la mer/The Silence of the Sea*. This was swiftly followed by an adaptation of *Les Enfants terribles* (1950), Cocteau's brooding meditation on innocence destroyed. As Vincendeau demonstrates, these early films were masterpieces of style and aesthetics that provided a blueprint for the complexities of narrative, form and theme that were to dominate in the director's later work. Working as an independent filmmaker-producer in the tradition of Méliès and Pagnol, and exploring the 'amateur' aesthetic so beloved of the *Cahiers* critics, Melville soon became a model for emerging new wave ambitions.

Although perhaps best known internationally for making a star of Alain Delon in *Le Samourai* (1967), it is *Bob le Flambeur* (1956) that first garnered him the admiration of his young acolytes, and that accorded most closely with the terms of Truffaut's 1954 call to arms.

Melville's initial relationship with Truffaut et al. was a tight one, founded on mutual professional respect and a sense of shared purpose. In the pre-new wave years he held the privileged status of a 'filmmaker's filmmaker', an enabling and imaginative presence in French cinema. His professional association with some of the era's major technicians and stars, including Henri Decae, Martial Solal, Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Paul Belmondo, and his cameo appearance in one of its most iconic films (as Parvulesco in Godard's *A Bout de souffle/Breathless*, 1960) attests to his centrality in the activities of the movement. This easy collaboration, however, did not last. As the image on the front of Vincendeau's book makes strikingly clear, the relationship was to break down irretrievably: from the release of *Léon Morin, prêtre* in 1961 Melville was regularly taken to task over his seemingly blind love of commercial genres and his championing of what were perceived as anachronistic classic modes, and by 1966 he was in open dispute with the new wave coterie. Vincendeau's book subtly probes the reasons for this acrimonious divergence of interests; while Melville's age, experience and lack of career as a critic all counted against him in the long term, it is her titular designation of Melville as 'an American in Paris' that is most revealing. In a consummate discussion of genre, stardom and mise-en-scene, Vincendeau argues that the richness of Melville's cinema lay in his instinctive understanding and creative violation of the same classical Hollywood rules that so intrigued and inspired the upcoming generation of filmmakers; but as *Cahiers* became ever more politicized, his distinctly popular brand of transnational cinephilia came to be seen as 'selling out'. He died in 1973, unreconciled with his former admirers, and something of a stranger in his own house; it would take another two decades for the august *Cahiers* to recognize publicly his value as an auteur in a 1996 special issue of the journal that coincided with a retrospective of his work at the Cinémathèque Française.

While Vincendeau undertakes to redeem critically the work of a figure obscured by cinema history, Colin MacCabe's *Godard: a Portrait of the Artist at 70* takes the opposite tack, focusing on the most internationally renowned of the young *Cahiers* turks, a man whose turbulent film career remains forever anchored to the movement from which he so aggressively took his distance in the mid 1960s. MacCabe's book is a Joycean ode to the man he considers to be 'the great French poet of the twentieth-century' (p. 322), and whose 'filmmaking is amongst the most important European art of the second half of the twentieth-century' (p. xiv). MacCabe's adoption of the term 'portrait' attests to the sense of homage that informs the writing, and his book is

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imaginatively structured as a series of glances at the man, his work and his cultural environment. While biographical fact is a major strand of the book, the frozen snapshot of who did what and when is refused in favour of a mobile panorama in which intellectual history, film history, and political history are equally urgent priorities. The ambition to understand not Godard the man nor French film history per se, but rather to uncover and reveal the European modernist impulse to which Godard's work contributes, is a lofty one, but the aim suffers from no irony. As befits its subject, the book is a tour de force of French intellectual history, that situates Godard as part of a complex cultural jigsaw in which new wave cinema, buoyed up by the twin figures of Langlois and Bazin, is on a par with structuralism in import and influence on modern western culture. What interests MacCabe is less Godard's status as a maverick outsider, who goes on to distance himself from the Truffauldian mainstream of commercial filmmaking, but rather the continuities that structure his work and make it one of the most complex and intriguing oeuvres in the modern artistic corpus. He is in no doubt as to the significance of the new wave history, and clearly feels no need to rewrite its broad lines: nevertheless, one must sit up and take notice when he cites *Cahiers* as 'the most significant cultural journal of the twentieth-century' (p. 67), and Truffaut's 'Une certaine tendence du cinema francais' (1954) as 'arguably the single most important article in the history of French cinema' (p. 85). That he then lays the demise of new wave politics at the door of *Jaws* (1975) and the death of the Bazinian critic at that of the 1982 release of *Tron* is a masterclass in polemical thinking of the kind at which we know the author excels.

MacCabe's at times hyperbolic prose is part of both the charm and the erudition of this book. He paints a compelling picture of the fecund cultural landscape of postwar Paris, a small city rife with cineclubs, philosophers and theorists. He captures the energy and commitment of new wave filmmaking by tapping into the very core of the youthful optimism that underpinned it: the founding of *Cahiers* is described as a utopian, almost messianic gesture in which 'cinephilia was a politics in itself – to improve the cinema was to improve the world' (p. 73). He is quick to note the paradox that the auteurist politics of the new wave was out of step with the contemporary critique of theorists such as Barthes, Lacan and Althusser, and that the economic conditions of the American studios were already such that the analyses of *Cahiers* were rendered obsolete even at the very moment of their formulation. And he reminds readers that, for all its aesthetic experimentation, the aims of the key new wave figures were often pragmatic: commercial viability in tandem with critical appreciation.

This book gives an excellent sense of the fluidity of cinema history, highlighting examples of accident and contingency, while remaining fully aware of the power and unreliability of both anecdote and document. Godard is of course a mythological figure: here the myths are

rehearsed, enjoyed, and sometimes cursorily dismissed in a knowing footnote. The filmmaker himself emerges as an intense, frequently arrogant man; his exchanges with Truffaut, although well documented elsewhere, are worth the retelling just to give a sense of how profoundly and irretreivably the main protagonists of the movement disagreed over their joint heritage. Godard's self-imposed retreat from the 'contaminated image' of capitalist cinema is inventively accounted for, with MacCabe likening the director's Swiss studio to a Montaigne-like *arrière-boutique*, in which the intellectual journey continues to be travelled in the company of Anne-Marie Miéville. MacCabe is particularly eloquent when recounting Godard's involvement with the British Film Institute in the 1990s, and the final chapter is a warm personal memoir based on periodic contact between the author and the filmmaker in the 1980s and 1990s. MacCabe rightly advocates that Godard's lasting achievement was to continue as a trailbrazer in film practice long after the trail of the new wave years had gone cold. MacCabe's achievement, in turn, is to elucidate the Godardian project for the specialist and non-specialist alike in a highly readable and sympathetic study of the man and his work. Finally, Sally Shafto's thirty-page filmography must be singled out for particular praise: it is a major asset to MacCabe's book, and a valuable work of scholarship in its own right.

Richard Neupert's *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* is an accomplished and comprehensive account of the core history of the period, and bears comparison with the best of previous new wave studies. The extensive history and analysis are underpinned by an authoritative grasp of the major cultural shifts that occurred in France in the 1950s, and the excellent range of French references is one of the major strengths of the work. Using period accounts and box-office figures, Neupert succeeds in setting out for the reader what the new wave was, and how it felt for contemporary audiences to live through its development. He skilfully accounts for the impact of demographic change on the French cinema industry, and locates the emergence of the new wave in the growth of a new kind of popular cultural apparatus rather than in the more well-rehearsed developments in technology and funding structures. He convincingly demonstrates that the new wave directors were the product of a series of social and cultural circumstances from which they cannot be dehistoricized, and he is revealing on the role of Jacques Doniol-Valcroze rather than the more canonical Bazin in the early development of *Cahiers* (Bazin was already very ill with tuberculosis when the journal was founded in 1951). He deftly dispels received wisdom about the theoretical rigidity of the journal, arguing that 'throughout the 1950s it printed a surprisingly rich variety of articles and perspectives' (p. 29). In this context, his assessment of Truffaut's manifesto as 'something of a rarity' is a valuable check to those who might imagine that every critical intervention in the 1950s was somehow equally controversial.

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Nevertheless, while he berates scholarship in the field, and the imperial *Cahiers* itself for reducing the era to a set of 'tidy lists' (p. xvi) and for 'condensing the era and its major figures into simple summaries' (p. xvi), Neupert himself is hard pressed to take us further than the canonical figures, with the heavyweights Truffaut, Godard and Chabrol meriting individual chapters and more marginal and less-investigated characters subsumed into predicatable 'sub-categories' of the movement. Admittedly, he takes steps to extend the new wave community by looking at its precursors, some of whose low-budget experiments became the marketable example, and usefully demonstrates how Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme/And God Created Woman* (1956) in particular provided the kind of success story that the *Cahiers* cohort was keen to emulate but never quite did. The magnificent box office for Truffaut's *Les Quatre cents coups/400 Blows* (450,000 tickets) is put into sorry perspective by the earnings of Vadim's film ($4 million for its US release alone). Elsewhere, Eric Rohmer, whose first major film was not released until 1968, is held up as an important example of someone with a much more marginal production trajectory than might be assumed. But given the narrowness of his own sample, Neupert is perhaps more surprised than his reader to find by finding the fundamental importance of the core *Cahiers* group confirmed by his research.

If there is a further caveat to Neupert's well-presented overview, it is that his study is a text-book example of Jill Forbes's thesis that nostalgia for the era is a trap into which English-language critics fall all too easily.[2] As the author himself observes, 'there is nothing like re-discovering a *nouvelle vague* masterpiece and remembering why it is one does film history in the first place' (p. xxix). While enthusiasm and respect for art are never flaws in a project like this, the tendency to regard every production of the period as a key work of reference inevitably dilutes the project of demystification, and thereby hampers Neupert's stated aim of casting this already well-documented history in new light. This book will indisputably be an excellent source of information for the undergraduate film students at whom it is aimed, but while it provides strong narrative analysis of individual films, the case studies will be of limited value to anyone already familiar with the output and personalities of the era.

As Forbes points out in her invaluable study *The Cinema in France: After the New Wave*, the new wave remains a powerful critical category serving 'both to define the art film and deplore its demise' (p. 3). Godard and Melville are but two examples of the plethora of modern French filmmakers who have been positioned according to their artistic, ideological, generational or simply temporal proximity to it (witness the various 'new new waves' of French cinema of the 1980s and 1990s). The three books under review show exactly why these vibrant years, in which so many paths crossed, remain a key point of entry for those seeking to understand the shape and multiple directions postwar French

2   Jill Forbes, *The Cinema in France: after the New Wave* (London: British Film Institute/Macmillan, 1992), p. 3.

cinema has taken. They are all valuable for the light they shed on the broader impact of a localized movement that was over almost as soon as it began; and they confirm, if such confirmation were needed, that reinvestigations of the work and legacy of this particular era in film history are indeed worth the effort.